INTERREGNUM APA

#36

EXPLORING SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, HORROR & ROLEPLAYING

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#36

**An Amateur Press Association
exploring the worlds of
Roleplaying, Fantasy, and Science Fiction**

Kiralee McCauley, Editor

**Topics: Gming Mechanics: Genre or Universal?
Gaming and the Millennium**

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(In collation order)

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

⇨ The Deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #37 is February 15th. The topics are **How to describe a game?** and **How do you define Science Fiction?** Interregnum #37 will be mailed around March 1st.

⇨ The Deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #38 is April 1st. The topics are **Props, Paraphernalia, and Stage Dressing** and **Crossing Generations in Games and Fiction.** Interregnum #38 will be mailed around April 30th.

The Editor's Soapbox

Upcoming Topics:

Next Issue, Topic A: **How to Describe A Game?** There seems to be a consensus among IR writers. One of the best ways to mess up a group is for the players to miscommunicate about what kind of game they want to play, or what kind of game they are playing. To prevent this, one needs to be able to describe a game accurately. What attributes are important? Are their categories, or ways of categorizing games that are useful? And what about the language? Does everybody know, or mean the same thing by 'high-powered?'

Next Issue, Topic B: **How do you define Science Fiction?** I'm asking this one out of curiosity. It seems that I'm always missing the boat when the high mucky mucks of fandom discuss such things, but I'm always hearing rumors about the bizarre results of their decisions. Star Wars is not science fiction, but there is a story about an alien invasion - you know, aliens come from another world, in great ships, with awesomely advanced technology, and a captain with godlike majesty, who just happens to be named Cortez. Despite historical accuracy it's a classic science fiction story. I don't expect to resolve the issue. But I'm curios what definitions the readers and writers of IR use, what you consider 'classic' science fiction, and what, if anything, looks like science fiction but isn't.

Following Issue, Topic A: **Props, Paraphernalia, and Stage Dressing.** What items, methods and tools do you use to improve the feel of game setting and get your players in the right mood for your game? What effects have you borrowed from the theater, or elsewhere, to make your characters come alive. Which ideas have you used that have succeeded tremendously, which have failed miserably, and why? What devices have helped game play, improved game play or ended arguments that could have delayed or broken the entire feel of your game? Music, Lighting, costuming, funny accents, visual arts, sound effects, secret decoder rings, smoke, mirrors, faerie dust, or computer aids can all be of interest.

Following Issue, Topic B: **Crossing Generations in Games and Fiction.** How do you create games and stories that work for both Children and Adults? How do you keep things interesting for adults, while remaining understandable to children? What about those 'touchy subjects' we're told are only for mature audiences? Does it make a difference if the parents are directly involved? (Or is this one of the differences between gaming and writing, that parents can be involved in their children's games, but are not presumed to be a part of their children's reading?) If you've played in games involving multiple generations, what was the experience like? If you've tried to write for multiple generations, how did it go? Or is this something that can only work by accident, like Lewis Carroll and Alice in Wonderland?

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CHAPTER. The Natives Are Friendly

Comet sailed over northern California, the morning sun bright over her left shoulder. Alex had been very convincing. She'd frightened people. Another visit would calm them down. Pickering's friends in the Army Air Corps had agreed to his suggestion. They wanted her to visit them and let them examine `the vehicle that passed over Washington'. He'd told them they could only examine the vehicle if they promised not to dissect its pilot. They'd happily agreed. She hoped they wouldn't be too disappointed when they learned that the pilot was the vehicle.

Having Aurora track her, with Star and Cloud and Eclipse ready to teleport to her rescue, made her feel a lot safer. That was what friends were for, after all, to stand behind you when you put your neck on the headsman's chopping block. Besides --- something she hadn't told Alex --- while he spoke to the Air Corps on the bell, Aurora had traced the bell lines and read the Army men's minds, enough to be sure they weren't thinking of hurting her.

She glanced at her map. You couldn't miss Mount Shasta; its snow-capped cone was visible for hundreds of miles. The big body of water was Shasta Lake, with Reading on the far side. Route 5, the bridge across the lake, led straight south to Sacramento. There she would meet an Army Air Corps escort.

Alex had lectured her about manners near fighter planes. He hadn't quite thought that he was giving a lecture on manners, but manners were how you behaved with other people, so he was talking about manners. Local pilots were very nervous if you flew directly behind them, where you could shoot at them and for some mysterious reason they couldn't shoot back. She should stay in front of them. That would be very easy, she thought, if Alex was right that Army aircraft couldn't pull more than fifteen or twenty gees any more.

Route 5 rolled south, two wide strips of concrete separated by a continuous hedge of rose bushes. Once she dove from the black sky of seventy thousand feet to skim thirty feet off the ground, checking that she was following the right highway. She could read the road signs from altitude, but there was no reason to advertise how good her vision was. At fifty feet the air felt smooth and slick as olive oil, giving a warm syrupy resistance to her steady three thousand knots. A faint hiss marked molecules being dragged to the side and pushed back into place, her sonic boom squelched by side effects of her flight field.

Comet spent minutes daydreaming, admiring farm fields, olive trees, and fresh spring grass. The next town was Woodland; the big city further ahead was her destination. She focussed attention on the sky, looking for aircraft, a pair of specks that should be orbiting over Sacramento, thirty miles away. There! The design was strange, squarish with split tails, but those had to be F-22s. Alex had shown her a picture. She rolled upward.

Trisha? Her sister had been following her progress. *The Army Air Corps people started tracking you. I'm following tesla links to their airplanes.*

What're they saying? asked Comet.

'Delta Tango Two Niner, Bogey at az Two Eight Zero, range three zero miles, Angel one four thousand feet, incoming at two nine hundred knots, climbing now to angel two two thousand feet.' chanted Aurora.

The airplanes were turning ever so slowly toward her, control surfaces flaring, wings almost vertical.

'Delta Tango Two Niner, bogey at angel three five thousand feet, range now two three miles, incoming at three thousand four hundred knots. There is a single, repeat single target. No trace of missile launch.'

I should hope not, Comet answered to no one in particular, *they promised not to shoot at me!*

Trisha? said Aurora, *They mean you're not shooting at them. They are aiming at you.*

Oh, positively wonderful. Comet's thanks had a sarcastic tinge. Pickering had sworn it was safe, hadn't he? What was aimed at her?

She edged sideways and hit the brakes, shedding her thousands of knots in a few seconds. Now she was flying parallel to the fighter planes, scarcely a hundred feet from their wingtips, keeping a constant station in their formation. She waited patiently while their pilots --- fast for ungifteds, she noted --- realized she had joined their flight.

'Delta Tango Two Niner,' repeated her sister, *Radar shows bogey matches your az and alt.'*

The pilots didn't look frightened. *'Star Leader, Delta Tango Two Niner copies and confirms.'* repeated Aurora. Comet flitted towards them and forced her flight field water-white, making it clear as glass. Pushing her field clear while maintaining Mach One needed concentration; she'd only learned the trick recently. The pilots stared in wonder. They had been joined by a sparky tangerine ball that bore no semblance to anything except a crayon sketch of the Great Comet of 1999. The ball had suddenly faded into transparent air, revealing a human figure flying without visible means of support. Comet waved.

'Star leader, this is Delta Tango Two Niner.' Aurora passed to Comet the flight leader's words, snatched by Aurora from the pilot's microphone cable. *'I have visual contact. The bogey has joined our formation. Bogey matches the Washington sightings. The bogey pilot has waved and I am acknowledging.'* The pilot waved back at Comet. *'That's a real small fuselage she has. Estimate no go on radio to the bogey.'* The flight leader decided not to try explaining that the bogey appeared to have no fuselage at all.

'Star leader copies. Bring her home.'

The pilot waved to Comet again, gesturing for a turn south. *'Delta Tango Two Niner turning home.'* Comet effortlessly followed the aircraft, her flight field slipping back

to its natural salmon-orange as they boosted through Mach two.

A fraction of an hour brought them to the southern California desert. Salt flats glistened in the early spring sun. The wide expanse of Edwards Air Force base stretched beneath them. The fighter aircraft landed in precise formation; Comet kept pace, staying a few feet above the runway as the fighter planes taxied to a distant corner of the airfield.

That was a reception committee, she decided, military officers, technicians, and gaping black-painted hangars. Only if you looked carefully did you notice soldiers hidden here and there, machine guns and rocket launchers trained in her direction. She decided not to worry. They were frightened, not angry.

Aurora spoke to her, mind to mind, repeating what her escort told their controllers. The pilots innocently advised ground control that Comet appeared to have VTOL capacity, and probably would not need a tow to the hangar. Comet floated over the concrete, hovering while technicians took photographs of her flight field. The field folded in on itself, depositing her on the ground a few yards from the officer who was obviously coordinating operations.

Comet could see the tension in the air. She was visibly not what they had expected. Or were they looking at her clothing? They seemed to be. Was something wrong with it? Her garb was fresh-ironed, every stitch in place. The whole gang had looked her over, Janie combing her hair until it fell properly over the straps of her domino. Nothing could possibly be wrong there.

She tried her warmest smile. ``Hi! I'm Comet.'' She took a quizzical General's hand. ``Alex Pickering said I owed you an apology for scaring you over Washington, I mean, when all I was trying to do was visit my friends, except they're not there any more because someone changed history so the real world got turned into your world.'' That explained everything, and was so simple that everyone would know exactly what she meant. She reminded herself not to emphasize that, once Eclipse and Janie worked out the details, the five would be putting history back the way it belonged, altering time until her reality prevailed and their reality ceased to exist.

``Comet? I'm General Wilkerson. Welcome to Edwards. We're all pleased to meet you.''

They strolled across the concrete into a hangar. Comet tried to ignore the hum of cameras. She decided she was happy she'd worn gloves and domino. All those people staring at her would have been a bit much, if she'd had nothing to hide behind. Wearing her domino, she could pretend they were on the other side of a fence, while she stared at them through the knotholes. She was positive she was blushing, cheeks a match for her carefully combed copper hair.

``Will you need refuelling?'' the General asked innocently, hoping she'd reveal which fuel was involved. There wasn't the least sign of flight gear on the woman anywhere, he noted. Much of her clothing was skintight. Miniaturization or not, you certainly couldn't hide anything as large as a rocket engine under her costume. Indeed, you couldn't hide anything at all under much of that costume. Wilkerson forced himself to reject the impression that Comet, as Professor von Pickering had named her, was no older than his oldest grand-daughter. Some women, he told himself, were more trimly built than others; this one had presumably taken physical conditioning to an extreme. Her mask, gaudy green and gold crossed comets with the profile of a giant butterfly, hid eyes and cheeks but left her nose and mouth free. As an oxygen mask, it appeared ineffective. Nonetheless, there had been a radar track. The pilots had been ordered to push her flight envelope, seeing if there were altitudes or speeds at which she couldn't match the Air Force's hottest fighter plane. She'd followed every maneuver with no sign of strain, including a sustained run at altitudes at which blood under unprotected skin would boil.

``Refuelling? Oh, lunch? Sure, thank you. Though I really just had breakfast so you don't need to put yourself out of your way for me, I mean, that's very kind of you, if you'd like to have lunch I'm happy to join you.'' She tried a deeper smile, wishing they wouldn't crowd quite so close. Her back was ramrod straight; the boots in her garb gave her an extra half inch of height. She was still looking steeply up at all these people. Logically she knew she could be airborne before they could grab her. Her heart said she was twelve, they were grownups, and they had her surrounded.

``I'd actually been thinking of JP-4, or whatever, for your flight gear,'' he responded.

Comet managed not to giggle, then launched into an extended explanation of gifts and personae, ending with her experiences over Washington. She found herself sitting on a workbench table, surrounded by a cluster of enthralled men and women, one of whom thoughtfully presented her with a mug of hot cocoa and a sour-cream glaze donut. They had to be good people, she decided; they were giving her chocolate. There was an occasional background whisper, people comparing notes with what Eclipse had told the Lemurians. Asked how she knew so much about Washington's antiaircraft defenses, Comet noted that they'd all fired at her, concluding ``Well, sure I'm speeded up when I'm flying, so I can see things like bullets and rockets moving fast as me; it'd be real inconvenient to be flying a couple thousand miles an hour right off the ground and not be able to dodge if a fence came along.''

``You can see what's coming, sure. A jink is a turn. How many gees can you pull?'' asked the seniormost fighter pilot.

``I don't feel gees, because a flight field keeps you from feeling them; it pushes on all of you at the same time so there's no pressure like there is in a roller coaster,'' she answered. Then she understood the question. ``Oh, how many will my gift deliver? Ummh, there's a girl I know in New York who got supersonic inside a base ball nines stadium. That's like seventy-five gees (her older brother the science whiz figured it out and I checked his math to make sure the details were right) and I'm faster than she is --- course I'm a half-year older than her --- I can do a hundred gees, I guess.'' Comet sank into herself for a moment, reminded of yet another friend with whom she'd never again go cloud-diving, not until Janie and Eclipse

solved everything.

"A hundred gees? That's more than a Sprint." There was a tone of disbelief.

"I don't suppose," asked the General, "you could be persuaded to demonstrate?"

"Sure! Would someone like to come along?" she asked. "I absolutely positively never drop anyone ungifted. Honest. I promise." She hadn't expected such a scramble of volunteers, a scramble lasting until General Wilkerson noted that rank hath its privileges.

* * * * *

Star balanced teapot, boiling water, cups, and plate of sweet biscuits on a silver tray. Had he forgotten anything? Milk, sugar, spoons, napkins? No, he had it all. It was nice of Pickering to let them use his kitchen, but at breakfast Comet insisted they buy their own cups and saucers and teapot and tea. Using Alex's dishes was rude.She hadn't told them where to get the money, just announced how they should spend it. Cloud even agreed with her.

Comet made her trip to California and took the Army Air Corps General to Washington so people could say they were sorry they shot her. A short side trip got him moon rocks for his grandchildren. The Air Force people apparently had thought Comet had a rocket plane. They were were unhappy they didn't get to take it apart. They'd taken lots of pictures of her flying, but taking pictures wasn't as much fun as taking a machine apart. Star knew just how they must feel. He'd taken enough alarm clocks apart, and even put a couple back together well enough that they worked. That was a lot better than talking with someone.

The Army had told Comet they wanted to do experiments on her while she was flying. She told them she had errands to run first. She didn't explain: Alex might be rich, but he was already letting them sleep in his bedrooms. He kept pretending that he didn't expect them to pull leaves from the gutters, wash outside windows, or other things personas could do without a clumsy ladder. There had to be a trade for guest privileges; giving him a new tea service was one of them.

Eclipse was seated in the gazebo, head buried in the third of a large stack of books. She'd disappeared this morning, recalled Star, returning later with wads of local money, the books, a tea service with tea and biscuits, and changes of clothing for the whole group. Almost everything fit, too, and what didn't was too large. Comet had taken in Cloud's trousers, the only really bad fit of the lot. Asked where she'd found the money, Eclipse said that Leav'k had made windows of synthetic ruby and sapphire, emerald and diamond, so two millenia later large gemstones were been beautiful and common. Now Leav'k had never existed. Large gemstones had become beautiful, rare, and valuable.

Star hoped Eclipse hadn't sold anything she really liked. She wouldn't say. It wouldn't have been gifttrue to say, and to Star's eyes Eclipse had a wonderful concept of being gifttrue, no matter how totally wrong she was about the Namestone. She had been wearing her bracelets, afterwards, so it couldn't have been those. He was happy about that; he knew how fond

she was of them. Meanwhile, the five had their backs to the wall, nothing to their names except Pickering's charity, which they couldn't take, them being gifted and Pickering being ungifted. Cloud had told Pickering that; Pickering asked for time to think.

Eclipse wore a simple rose-gray jogging suit, collar zipped tight, with long sleeves covering her wrists. The breeze tugged at her hair, blowing stray silver curls back and forth across her ears. Her face was a relaxed smile, her attention entranced by whatever she was reading. When Eclipse focused on thinking, he decided, it was like Janie playing City of Steel. There was her mind and its prey, like a hawk stooping over a rabbit. Eclipse had to be drawing on her body field, he told himself; the breeze was too cold for someone to sit unprotected. It was chill and dank; blocks of darker clouds kept drifting across the sun. A golden shimmer at his wrists betrayed his own call on his gifts, enough to keep him warm despite the weather.

"Eclipse?" he said. She looked up at him, her steel-gray eyes radiant. "I thought you might be cold out here," he explained. "Besides, there's nothing for me to do. I'm waiting. I know you'll find the hints."

"Oh, Star, that's lovely." Her gesture encompassed tea and sweet biscuits. "For me? You really didn't have to. But thank you!" He shrugged in embarrassment.

"What else could I do? I can't help anyone, not you or Comet or even Aurora," he observed sadly.

"Star, you're doing fine. I haven't done more."

He set down his tray and began to make tea. Eclipse gave him her undivided attention. A solid pour of boiling water heated the pot and cups. From the pot he spilled six drops of water on the tray, one to each of the cardinal directions. The rest of the waste water went between two rose bushes. A dry spoon put tea leaves into the pot. Carefully, Star poured the rest of the boiling water, first slowly to dampen the leaves, then quickly to fill the whole pot. A wire whisk, strokes carefully matched left and right, dispersed the leaves. The whisk went on a towel; the lid went on the pot. A ceremony older than Atlanticea completed, the two inclined their heads to each other and waited for the tea to steep. If it had been the three girls having tea together, noted Star, they would just have dumped the tea leaves and water in the pot. The tea would have tasted practically the same. But he was a boy and Eclipse was a girl. There was a right way for a boy and a girl to behave when they were being polite to each other. Ultimately, Eclipse poured tea for the two of them and gestured at the third cup.

"Alex said he'd join us," he explained. They sipped their too-hot tea, talking of little things until Pickering came. Star dragged the conversation towards Eclipse's reading --- languages and cultures of the ancient world, places about which he knew almost nothing. The hint could be right in front of her, he thought, but how could she find it?

"Oh, I've found lots of hints," answered Eclipse. "No pattern. I dropped all the hints on Aurora. She's very good at finding hidden patterns --- that's what a gamesmistress is, after all, a pattern finder. There's something you and Cloud could try. Cloud got dragged through seventh-grade Historics --- I remember him complaining about exams. Not

that I blame him for complaining. He read about all the different countries in Massachusetts and Washington two thousand years ago. They were all there at once, and didn't notice each other. Proving history is all fairy tales, he said; no one could be as stupid as these people were. Could you two check out Washington? Look for ruins from Sarnath or Marik or Leav'k or, well, there should be lots of ruins, even more than Massachusetts. See which ones survived?" suggested Eclipse. "I tried Pickering's library. He's got lots of books on deciphering old languages. The same languages, but only five or ten of them, places that usually hardly get mentioned 'cause their people were real primitive. Egypt -- the pyramid builders. Babylon. But no place where people did machines, no ships or airplanes."

Pickering, now seated across the gazebo from them, recounted a story from a graduate of the local college, one who'd gone into English and foreign languages and found herself teaching near one of the Great Lakes. Her experience put a new scale on ignorance. She proposed teaching a foreign language in high school, to meet resistance from the school board. A board member's definitive contrary argument had been 'English was good enough for Jesus, and it's good enough for our children.' Pickering caught the look of his guests, slightly puzzled by a tale they knew was supposed to be amusing. "Of course, everyone knows that in ancient cultures people spoke their own language, never English, a school board containing an ignoramus who thinks the Apostles wrote in English rather than Hebraic or the Koine Dialectos being amusing." They looked baffled. "Perhaps humor doesn't translate, for all that your language appears to be English."

"I didn't see that!" Eclipse put hands to cheeks in horror. "Those languages --- Latin, Greek, Sumerian --- not a single ancient country spoke Historic English! How could I be so incredibly blind?"

"Don't get zapped, Eclipse." Star tried to be reassuring. "Seeing what's missing is hard." He launched into an anecdote, him fighting DeathMaster when DeathMaster went invisible, finding DeathMaster because DeathMaster's perfect copy of the building behind him lacked the flicker of declining fluorescent bulbs. While he spoke, thickening clouds darkened the sky, threatening the approach of rain.

"Forgive me," intruded Pickering. "Am I to understand that some of your ancient cultures spoke English?"

"Of course. Of course they spoke English. Not Modern English like us, but Historic English. I learned it in school," said Star. "Sarnath and Marik spoke Historic English. Atlantis and Rome didn't. Even I know that. Of course, everyone knows history is just a bunch of stories. So why houldn't stories make people speak English?"

"It's unreasonable," announced Pickering. "It's impossible! Languages descend from each other, so English and German and Dutch came from the same roots, like children from one family. If you're clever you can trace them back thousands of years. The ten-thousand-year reconstruction --- Nostratic --- used to be controversial. But you can see languages change into each other."

"Languages are related?" asked Star. "Like people?"

"Yes," said Pickering, "so father came from vater or pitr or whatever, so learning French is easier if you know Latin and Spanish."

"Gee, you should tell Cloud that," said Star. "He always says it doesn't matter what languages you know to learn a new one. A new language is new."

Eclipse gave Pickering a deeply penetrating look. "Loan words. Latin helicopterum, Atlanticea but not Rome having them."

"Not loans, ancestors," said Pickering. "We have, we appear to have, documents going back five thousand years. Don't you? You can line them up one after the next. You can see how one language became another, how the Latin V became U and V and W. I and J became two letters only a couple hundred years ago. And my history makes sense. All of it. That's more believable than your history. Rationally, it's your memories someone changed, so you believe in places like Atlantis." Pickering asked himself if he believed his own arguments. Time travellers? Children who flew? It was all unreasonable.

Star was taken aback. He could remember touring ruins of Sarnath, his father showing him murals and inscriptions. How could Sarnath not exist? How could languages descend from each other, when he'd seen inscriptions on those ruins and read the ones that were in Historic English? It couldn't be true.

"And who was I, before I became me? A runaway from your local orphanage?" said Eclipse, not expecting an answer. "Wherefrom came my gifts?" You could telehypnotize someone, she noted, until they believed they were a persona. But if you mindwiped an ungifted, she was still ungifted. No matter how much she believed she could fly, if you threw her off a cliff, she would fall straight down, terminal bounces not counting as flight. Eclipse knew she agreed with Pickering: She could be someone else, not Eclipse at all, no matter how loud her memories shouted the contrary. But if no one here were gifted, there was no one who could have been mindwarped into someone who flew.

* * * * *

The distant patter of raindrop on leaf and the slow drip of water cascading from branch to branch were the only sounds. Star and Cloud sat under an enormous fir tree, their gifts keeping their clothing dry, listening to the forest around them. Neither wanted to speak. Only the pressure of an approaching meal drove them to conversation.

"I used to daydream about camping. I'd dream about being out in the woods like this," said Cloud. "Camp sounded almost as frigid as having a base. You didn't need to be a persona to camp, either. Except when I became a persona, I never tried to get a base. None of us did. I lived at home. I never even went camping." He returned to listening to the tip-tap of the water.

"Except Eclipse," said Star. "She got herself a base and everything. All by herself." He sank into

quiet again.

``You know," Cloud said finally, ``Changing time sounds real hard. Putting back what the Namestone did sounds harder. We're not doing it overnight. Are we? Figuring we won't get lucky, I mean."

``All we have to do is find them," said Star. His voice was almost flat. ``Find them, and I'll blow them to pieces. Teeny-tiny pieces. Pieces so small they don't exist. Then we'll fix everything. Put it back right." He stared ahead. The depths of the woods were a study in brown: ground covered with needles and bark, sepia tree-trunks, light faded to rust by passage through layer after layer of twigs and branches.

``I'm with you, Star," Cloud agreed quietly. ``First I have to find them. I need time. We can't stay here with Pickering. He's not a relative. He's not part of our League. He puts up with us because we have gifts. So we can't stay. Staying is taking something from an ungifted by using our gifts. You can't do that! It's wrong!"

``I know. I know! We absolutely positively must leave! Soon. Where? We can't go home. It's not there! We checked that ourselves." Star combed his hair, straightening brown locks curled by spring damp, letting the activity distract him from the reality of the situation.

``No. We can't go home." Cloud told himself not to be frightened. He was a persona, and personas chased menaces, not the other way around. He paused before announcing his great idea. ``There aren't any personas until we fix history. There must be lots of places --- desert islands, mountain ranges, Mount Everest, Kapitan Mors being gone --- where no one goes. I just choose one. We go there and build a base. That's absolutely first. We build a base. Our base. Festung Greater Medford. Then we save the world."

``Now that's frigid!" Star's native enthusiasm finally bubbled to the surface. ``Build a base. A real base? With armor and atomic engines and robot defenses and all that great stuff?"

``Sure!" agreed Cloud. The slightest hint of doubt nagged at him. If this world had no personas, they probably didn't have chandlers supplying persona bases. Robot defenses sounded a bit tricky to build by yourself. Mayhaps he could ask Aurora. After all, base construction was all detail work, so a girl should be able to do it, once a boy told her what to get done. `Mayhaps keep it simple? We won't need it long, just until I catch the time pirates."

Star nodded assent. ``Hey. Cloud? We're the ones putting the world back, right? Can we put it back so we keep the base?" Possibly, thought Star, possibly in the end everything would turn out utterly frigid.

``Why not? All we need is a place and some plans and a pile of cash to pay for it," said Cloud. ``We should ask Comet about a place; she sees all sorts of things. And have her and Aurora write down everything we should put in the plans, like automatic minefields and tesdri-controlled nineteen-inch-guns. After all, everything' is a whole bunch of details, and girls are real good at details."

``Just so we do the final plans. And count all the money. That's outlines and numbers, so that's for us boys to do." Star told himself that his older sister and her math books didn't count. Girls didn't do math, he knew, even if when you paid close attention there seemed to be a terrible lot of girls who were real good at math, better than lots of the boys he knew. ``So where do we find all this money? Ask Eclipse?" The air seemed swiftly colder.

``Eclipse? Why not?" Cloud felt uncertain. ``She built a base. If you ask her a straight question, not about the Namestone or where she hides out, she gives good answers. Or tells you she doesn't know. She won't pretend to know what she doesn't, when she could brag herself up."

``She's a girl. She misses the obvious ways to brag herself up. But there was something Alex told me," remembered Star. ``He talked about local gangsters. It was real confusing, except one thing: some have piles of money."

``Stolen money? Or money we can salvage?" asked Cloud, almost standing with enthusiasm. If it was stolen, thought Cloud, you had to give it back to its owners, but sometimes criminals got money without stealing.

``No. That's a weird part. It's money people gave them `cause they wanted to. It's like sixty years ago, when there was Rectification, and chocolate smugglers on every street corner. Except these people, they don't smuggle chocolate." Star hesitated guiltily. ``I think Alex said they smuggle medicine. Bandages, that sort of stuff."

``People smuggle Surgibands?" Cloud was baffled. Some changes were strange, but others were unbelievable.

``I'm not sure. Alex only talked about the drugs part, but medicine is medicine, isn't it?" Star wished he'd understood better what Alex had been saying. It had been too strange. ``There's this guy in the County Jail. They caught him with thousands of dollars."

``That's lots. Even here. There must be something Alex didn't say, something everyone knows now, explaining how medicine smuggling makes you rich. And it sounded like Rectification? I know! There's a town library; I'll go and look it up. That's my job as League leader. I have to find what we need." Cloud's confidence increased with each syllable. They'd talked, and an answer had appeared, the way it should.

CHAPTER. Dreams and Shadows

Eclipse leaned back in a window seat, her shoes neatly stacked by the baseboard radiator, her feet primly tucked under her. She stared intently into her book, pausing once and again to write on a legal pad. A sheaf of overfolded pages hid notes from other references. Her face held a gentle grin; her eyes focused solely on the text she was struggling to understand.

Earlier, a heavy rain had pounded on the gazebo roof, driving her indoors and leaving puddles on open porches. Now gray blankets of cloud had given way to a watery blue sky. Once and again, the sinking sun forced her to shift her seat to retreat from its glare. Finally she noticed

that Comet had entered the room and was sitting quietly, waiting for her concentration to break. Eclipse peered up from her reading. A bright smile flashed across her lips; steel-gray eyes gleamed.

``I didn't want to interrupt,'' apologized Comet, ``You said you wanted to talk. Privately?''

``You're not. Interrupting, I mean. I'm going in circles. Not I know what I'm doing. I'm looking for a hint. It has to be there. The sun room down the corridor? Let me put these way. I only need a minute.'' Eclipse began shelving books, carefully, each to its original location.

The sunroom was house-long but narrow, barely wide enough for several outward-facing couches. A wide window seat with two rows of book shelves underneath ran the length of the room. Three walls of the room were almost completely windowed, large sheets of glass hiding behind a delicate diamond lattice of walnut strips. The fourth wall was hung with wooden objects d'art, paintings, and two large tapestries depicting the settlement of the West. Comet considered the window seat, generously furnished with large pillows, folded quilts, and a paisley object that might have been a sleeping bag except that its fabric obviously didn't belong out-of-doors. She choose the couch, giving her a view of Pickering's formal gardens.

Trees and evergreens, now barely escaped from winter's grip, formed a pattern, arranged to lead one's eyes to a single magnificent Japanese maple, perfectly framed by the rest of the garden. Except, she remembered, she had looked out the window when she first entered the room, and again when she looked at the sculpture above the window seat. Each time, she had had a different point of view. Each time, a different aspect of the garden had been framed, the maple to which she was now drawn having then been an accent rather than a centerpiece. It was a terribly subtle set of plantings, so arranged that a move of a few yards gave a new perspective.

Eclipse took the couch's other end. ``I promised to explain your dream. I couldn't with Star and Aurora there.''

``You thought it was very important, didn't you? You were awful fast to change the topic,'' said Comet.

``It's important to you. Did anyone ever tell you about dreams and planes?'' Eclipse tried to make her question sound matter-of-fact.

``Planes?'' answered Comet. ``No. Wait, there was this fellow I met the first time I visited Washington, who (when he wasn't busy telling me that I couldn't really be a persona because I was way too young so I couldn't possibly really have any deep gifts, as if I weren't obviously lots older than Star and Aurora) was busy talking about complete nonsense. Munin, his persona-name was; he seemed to remember an incredible lot but couldn't get it out in any order that made sense, so you just had to listen and put it together for yourself afterwards, like he was all memory and absolutely no common sense in between anyplace, let alone any paying attention if you asked a question. I remember. He talked about the sky, the breaking wave, the sea of grass, and said those were how strong I am.''

``The shallowest planes. They aren't really places. I think. They're a symbol. Ask someone whose

gifts just strengthened: what did they dream the next night? Almost everyone has the same dream. Even Lemurians.''

``I keep dreaming of green rolling hills, a place I've never been. On one hill I always see a temple.'' Comet remembered the vivid dream, grass the brilliant hue seen after spring rains, marble a flawless white with bright-hot smokeless flames gusting out between deeply fluted columns. ``A Greek temple like in American Geographic. Except it was burning, flames coming out from every entrance. I'd always see it in the distance, but if I tried flying to it I never got there, in fact I never got closer, it being that sort of dream.''

``The temple is the next plane. Or its symbol. When you were awake, your gifts hadn't reached the Temple plane, so dreaming you couldn't fly to the temple,'' explained Eclipse.

``Last night I was inside, marble walls glowing white-hot and fire beating around me, except I didn't feel warm. It didn't hurt. Well, it was like doing wind sprints until your arms and legs burn, except you know you really haven't hurt yourself. In one corner of the room, there was a ball of light, painful bright to see.''

``That's the Temple. You got down another plane all at once. Some people get closer and closer in their dreams. Then a bit at a time they're inside, because slowly they can reach down another plane with their gifts.''

``Everyone has the same dream? Every persona?'' asked Comet.

``I don't know every,'' answered Eclipse. ``Some people don't dream. Some forget. Why a dream? I don't know. Why are there personae? It really doesn't make sense. Evolution, you know? Fish to dinosaurs to birds?''

``Of course I know!'' said Comet. ``I mean, I'm not that dumb, for all you think circles around us whenever you try, but daddy put that sort of thing in front of us, every morning when we were having breakfast, so we'd always start the day by thinking about something.''

``You're not dumb at all! You're smarter than me,'' countered Eclipse. ``You outwitted the Keeper of the Tunnels. I'd never have pullled that off. I just knew a couple extra facts. Had extra time to think. That makes me look smart. I'm not that smart, not really. So, where did personae come from? Evolve, I mean? Do monkeys fly? Do baboons shoot lightning bolts from their eyes? No, not at all. But the dreams come from someplace. The same place as personae, so people who do public personae get dreams. The dreams signify you moved down.''

``They do?'' Comet felt baffled. Where did Eclipse learn her facts? You could count on her being right, but where did she learn all these things? Not in any library Comet had ever seen, and she had a library card at her father's Institute. It was like Eclipse knew people who saw the world as a big stage play, and they knew how to press the buttons and move the scenery.

``You'd forgotten Munin, yes? He probably told you the next ten planes. Munin'll talk on forever. But you won't see a plane. Not until you're ready. Almost everyone can't even remember a plane's name. Not until they're ready to use it.'' Eclipse looked thoughtful. ``Wait. You saw the Sun? The firey ball in the temple? You're sure?''

``Sure.'' Comet smiled.

``That's the gate to the plane below the Temple. Would you promise absolutely not to tell Star or Aurora? It's very dangerous. Star really is too young to know.No matter how sick I am of people telling me I'm a little girl and should do what I'm told like all other good little boys and girls, and Give Them That Goddess-Cursed Namestone Right Now, there really is such a thing as too young.'' Eclipse's tone bespoke her annoyed contempt for her hordes of enemies.

``People tell you?'' asked Comet. ``Gee! I thought it was only us. After the Maze, you were treated like a grown-up. Such as, the whole League of Nations did turn out for you, though you're right, all they said was `give us the Namestone right now, and don't expect us to say please, you little slink, or we'll beat it out of you'; they could've at least been polite; but if I promise not to say, do you promise to tell Star and Aurora someday?''

``Done. If something happens to me, so I can't, it's your call what to do,'' promised Eclipse.

``Deal!'' answered Comet enthusiastically. ``What can happen to you?''

``Oh, little things. FedCorps catches me. The Manjukuoan gold gets doubled again. The Italians put up the Sistine Chapel as a bonus. No, they did that already; they could put up the museums of Florence. Little things like that.'' In Eclipse's voice, the enmity of the world shrank to a minor nuisance. ``Anyhow. There's a trick, a way to get extra power. Find the Temple. It's in your mind. Reach into the Sun. Deep. Oh, it'll hurt like heck. It's not safe. You're overloading. You'll get sick later. People don't usually die that way.''

``All those planes you named; I can do ... four. Five with your trick. How deep can you go?'' asked Comet. ``If you don't mind saying?''

``I'm not sure I can tell you. Until you use a plane, it's hard to remember the plane is there. Besides, I don't know. I know how far I went at the deepest. If I'm careless, sooner or later I'll go too deep and not surface. The Sun, the Matrix, the Fall of Crystal, the Tomb, the Hall of the Lidless Eye. I could go on. Don't even think of trying them. Stop with the Sun,'' warned Eclipse. ``Well, unless you're for absolute sure going to die elsewise; then it doesn't matter.''

``I hear you ... I heard what you said about hurting yourself. I mean, it's not like I'm a boy always having to be bragging myself up, no matter whether it makes any sense, or whether anyone with any sense would see that bragging up doing something dangerous is just plain stupid,'' said Comet matter-of-factly.

``Sorry.'' Eclipse shrank into the crook of the couch. ``You're right. I should have trusted you. Boys are the problem. Always showing off and bragging themselves up. They have to prove something. That's another reason not to tell Star. He's a boy.''

``You don't have to apologize. I know you were protecting me, because...''
Comet tried to cover over Eclipse's embarassment.

``I've gone too deep. More than once. I hurt myself, was sick for days. It's safer for you, your gang can heal you, but I need to be awake...''

``you care about us, no matter what my slink brother keeps saying, though if he'd stay away from Cloud he'd be a lot better, but you're totally right about Star; he thinks nothing can hurt him,'' finished Comet.

``to put myself back together,'' continued Eclipse. ``Cloud is a pain. He just wants everyone to do what he says. He never listens to anyone. No matter what they say. When he's talking about me, he just echoes what he heard on the video.'' She looked wistfully at the garden. ``I had to do the Maze. I had to! FedCorps was going to solve it. They didn't understand the Namestone. They wouldn't listen. Not to me! Not that I tried very hard. Why bother? They're boys at heart, even FlameMistress.'' Eclipse threw up hands in disgust.

``Did you try? At all?'' asked Comet. ``Not that I blame you, if you didn't, because you're really right; FedCorps wouldn't have listened, not until you took the Maze, because until then they thought you were just another little girl like Aurora and me, except you were very cautious about meeting people, and cared about getting your rewards in cash, even when they mumbled about putting your money aside for college, except like mayhaps all of once they said you were very good for being our age after you took out the three DeathMaster replicants all by yourself at the same time.''

``I tried to tell them. You know Starsong?'' asked Eclipse. Comet nodded. ``He's usually good at listening. People respect him. A lot. He's a mentalist. Enough to understand about the Namestone. So I tried him. I might have been talking to a wall, for all the good I did.''

Comet listened thoughtfully. ``This was last Winter?'' She waited for Eclipse's agreement. ``That explains it. Last December, there was this two weeks when FedCorps couldn't hear enough about you. No matter what I said, they'd bring the conversation back to you, and then they started telling us we should be careful of you because you must have foreigners pulling your strings, because you were trying to keep them from doing important things except they'd never say which things so we never believed them.''

``Great. Telling Starsong was worse than useless,'' lamented Eclipse. ``I worked so hard to plan that. My plans worked out backwards. Shows what happens to complicated plans. I tried to make friends. Instead I got them mad at me, so they tried to get you guys mad at me. That half succeeded. I tried to keep them off the Maze. Instead I got them to work extra hard on it. They figured I was a stooge, part of some plot to keep them from doing the Maze, so someone else would get the Namestone. So instead of waiting five years, like they'd planned, they were about to do it last Winter. I had to take the Maze

last month. Instead of growing up first, waiting till it would have been easy."

``But you did it. You did," reminded Comet. ``And I don't care what anyone else says, you proved you were the greatest persona in the world up there with Solara and Prince Mong-Ku and Plasmatrix-the-Desolation-of-the-Goddess, because none of them ever tried the Maze, but you took it all alone." Comet's eyes glowed with admiration, for the fantastic thing her friend had done by herself.

``I did do it, didn't I?" Eclipse looked at the garden. ``I must have. I remember holding the Namestone. I cradled it in my hands: a frozen piece of sky polished into a ball. And that last climb? Out from the Tomb into the sunlight? It was wonderful! More wonderful than anything! Even if I still get nightmares." She saw Comet's worried look. ``Not a big trade." Her tone hardened. ``They're almost only when I push too deep."

* * * * *

Pickering padded the round of his widow's walk. This evening had repeatedly been frustrating. He had deduced parts of Einstein's Transitivity. No, he told himself, he had part of the forms for von Pickering's Theory of Universal Transitivity. The one true Einstein died believing in general relativity. Transitivity was his alone. He still needed to eliminate a few minor lacunae in his analysis.

His contacts in Washington were confused. On one hand, Comet's talents presented them with enormous opportunities. On the other hand, for a Federal Agency to retain without parental consent the services of a minor child -- who apparently had no guardians --raised novel legal questions. Pickering wondered if his informants had been infected by the White House's indecision. He had not been entirely pleased with the results of the last Congressional elections, even given the Impeachment Crisis, but the present situation was unreasonable. Legal order seemed to be collapsing. Since Election Day, scarcely five months ago, the National Guards of half of the states had been called to the colors by their governors. It appeared that tomorrow morning the State Legislature of New Hampshire was going to mobilize the state's unorganized militia --- the armed adult citizenry --- an act with only pre-Civil War precedents. Washington made vague calls for peace and calm. Admittedly, he noted, the past four years had demobilized most of the Armed Forces, the Army and Navy dipping towards numbers last seen under Herbert Hoover, but the Federal government could still try something.

The caller from Global Broadcasting had been crisp and clear. Someplace, someone had leaked a suggestion that he, the great Alexander Humboldt von Pickering, might be able to reach the mysterious entities who rescued the Lemuria. Pickering had been politely noncommittal. If he confirmed the rumor, he knew that tomorrow Table Rock would be crawling with television personalities, newspaper columnists, professional ethicists, and other epsilon-minus semi-morons. That would not suit. As a purely hypothetical question, he inquired what GBS's interests in personae were. Did they want photographic stills, a few sound bites, or an hour of Sunday Morning Talking Head? Pickering forwarded an offer to the five.

* * * * *

Aurora sat at the wonderful desk in her bedroom. It was her size, not for grown-ups; this whole room had been laid out for children. Idly, she wondered whose children; Pickering had none, and seemingly never had visitors in his home, either. The boys slept in long grownup beds, but she had something that matched her four and a fraction feet. She set to writing.

``Dear Diary,

Today I stayed here at A--- P---'s home all day. Comet went to California this morning. I read their minds, the Army people in California, and made sure she was safe. If she wasn't, Star and Cloud and E------ would have rescued her.

P---'s computer plays chess. We played. It's very good at tactics. Its book isn't that great, but no one's book is good any more. They've only played chess for hundreds of years, not thousands and thousands, so they've got things wrong. The computer has an opening book with commentary. I made the computer go through all the openings it knew, even bad ones like the Atlanticean, and say what people thought of them. When I went after its mistakes, it lost. When I stayed with openings it had right, it beat me. I played A---. He has no idea how to play chess. Games aren't important now, not like the way they used to be. I told A---- I wanted to be a Mistress of Games when I grew up, and he smiled. He thought I was good to be ambitious. Then he asked what a Mistress of Games was. After I told him, he tried to be polite, and still tried to say I should do something serious. Like anything in the world could possibly be more important than being a GamesMistress. Even Star agrees about that. Well, I guess I could become a High Programmer, or the Analyst Supreme.

I should have been searching for clues, but there was this absolutely unique chess opponent sitting there.I peeked at the Sea of Glass. There really is a country there. They play bichrome Stones, two liberties, except only a 19x19 board.The Lemurians and everyone else must have been studying Stones longer than these Nihonese have studied Go, to want a bigger board and more rules. Telzey only plays 19x19 Stones, and doesn't know polychrome or other-liberty rules.

Star and Cloud went for a walk in the State Park. Lots of trees and grass and quiet. E----- spent all day studying. I watched her. She was going through books and taking notes, working harder than Comet does for school, the day before an exam. She was looking for the answer. She hasn't found it yet. She will! She did the Maze. She can do anything. I know she can. Love, Aurora."
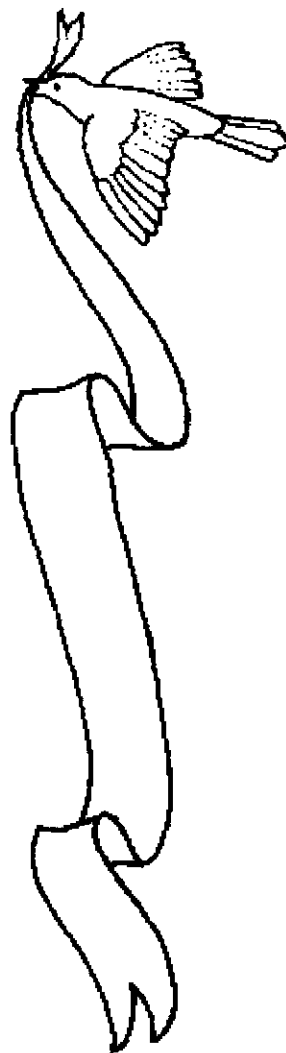
Happy New Millennium!

Preferences in Game Mechanics

Universal game mechanics have a number of benefits. You can learn the rules once and they remain consistent no matter what world you're playing in. It's easy to compare characters from different worlds and know which one is strongest, smartest or has the most artistic skills. Since I happen to enjoy doing comparisons between my characters from various games, I consider this a plus. Also, I like having characters be able to travel between worlds, but don't like converting characters into a different mechanic, since that usually results in discrepancies between what the character can do under the old and the new mechanics.

But there are some things a universal mechanic can't do. Let's say that I'm designing two world bases. One is high fantasy. Everyone knows about magic and the majority of characters know one or two spells but only the top mages know more than a dozen. The other is modern fantasy. Most people don't even believe in magic, but those rare individuals who choose to practice it usually know at least a dozen spells. While it is possible for one mechanic to *allow* characters that would fit both worlds, it would be impossible to design one that would *encourage* the types of characters that fit in both settings.

You also run into problems where certain skills or traits may be highly valuable in one setting and totally inappropriate in another. For example, the high fantasy setting may have active deities who sometimes have children with mortals, while the modern setting's gods work subtly, behind the scenes and there's no solid evidence to support their existence. Being the child of a deity would be an appropriate trait for the high fantasy setting, but not the modern one. On the other hand, computer operations and automobile driving would be common skills in the modern setting, but totally unheard of in the other.

A modular mechanic gives you the best of both worlds. You can have the same basic attributes and the same method of choosing skills and traits, but use different lists of those available for each setting. In the high fantasy setting, each spell can be a separate skill, making it easy to know just one or two. Several traits that give extra

points to buy occult skills with can be included to allow mage characters but, even so, huge numbers of spells will be rare. In the modern setting, being able to cast at all requires a minimum of three skills, but all mages have starting spells equal to their Mind attribute (which ranges from 1 to 20 for normal humans) unless they buy a skill or trait to increase this.

Roleplaying and Television

When I was young, I ran free form solo roleplaying games for myself using characters borrowed from my favorite television shows. My PCs frequently stretched the limits of what was really reasonable for the original setting, if they didn't exceed them and things tended to get more bizarre as the campaign progressed. As Kiralee mentioned last issue, I rated the shows based on the number and extent of the campaigns they inspired. However, most people probably wouldn't qualify those as roleplaying games since they involved neither mechanics nor other players. Also, speaking objectively, I wasn't actually playing in the worlds I was borrowing from, but shadows of those worlds and distant ones at that.

I met Kiralee in college and we started playing one on one. That series of campaigns included a lot of things that were new to me. Some of my PCs were not only compatible with their world, but enough so that it was possible to rewrite episodes of the shows to fit them in. I played alternate versions of myself. I experimented with alternate timelines. I expanded the world so much that I could run scenarios that didn't involve any of the borrowed characters or my original PC. In fact, most people looking at Magicians' Universe wouldn't be able to tell it was originally based on a TV show, let alone which one. I adopted NPCs as PCs, even male ones. I took PCs from one world and moved them to another rather than creating a new character in the world I wanted to play in.

Eventually, that phase of our lives ended. We started working full time jobs. Joe moved in. Kiralee and I couldn't play one on one anymore because we weren't spending the huge amounts of time together that was necessary. I went back to solo games. I played mostly alternate versions of myself and didn't do much with television shows other than rewrite episodes.

After Methos' first episode aired, I started getting involved in Highlander fandom. I was introduced to the concept of fanfic and convinced to give it a try. I continued to roleplay in my head but, as time passed, I started writing down a larger percentage of these. Now all my best/most interesting games end up as fanfic. (Many of these are unfinished and some were done with the knowledge that they'd probably never be published.) But they still qualify as writing fanfic, even if many of them fall into the grey area in-between writing and roleplaying.

And one more thing... The Misfits of Science, by the definitions I gave Kiralee, would have been a third favorite show. To earn the title of my favorite show of all time, a show can't follow my rules, it has to transcend them.

Review of King of Dragons Pass

King of Dragon Pass by A Sharp, LLC (www.a-sharp.com) is an interactive game which tells the story of the colonization of Dragon Pass in the world of Glorantha.

Though I had only a passing acquaintance with Rune Quest and therefore knew very little of the world from the roleplaying game, I have still enjoyed playing the computer game. When you play King of Dragon Quest, you are in charge of a clan and make all the major decisions for it, starting with the most important actions of your ancestors in the Godtime of prehistory. Many of these choices have the strongest impact on the early stages of the game, since they determine what is available to you at the time your clan settles in Dragon Pass, but some will last the entire game. Don't pick the beastmen as your clan's ancient enemy. There are a couple of clans of humanoid ducks, one of which will be discovered to be your clan's neighbor. Since the ducks are beastmen, if your ancestors fought them, you must too or it will hurt your clan's magic. When I tried it, I got wiped out by other beastmen in retaliation a few years later.

Each game year consists of five seasons with two player initiated actions per season. There are a large number of options for actions including sending parties out to explore the world, sending trading missions to other clans, building temples to the gods, raiding other clans and holding a feast. In addition, there are events initiated by the computer as well as unfinished business from previous turns which may need further input from you. Some of these are resolved immediately, but others may have ramifications for years to come with more events caused by them or additional choices added to a menu. All the decisions you make are multiple choice, which is nice at times, since it lets you know which options are available, but can be frustrating occasionally if you want to try something that the game designer didn't think of. Some decisions that fail to work may just bring you back to the same menu with that choice removed while others leave you with unhappy people or other bad results.

The seven members of your clan ring give you advice on the decisions you have to make whether player initiated or computer initiated. This can be very helpful, especially to someone new to the game as the characters know much more about what is appropriate for their world than the players do. Unfortunately, your advisors may suggest you make a choice that brings you to another menu without giving you information about how to make that decision. If they have an opinion, they will tell you as part of their initial advice. The advice doesn't change when you get to the sub-menu. (So those ring members who opposed the decision you made will still be recommending their course of action and they can't react to any changes in the situation or new information gained.) Note that the advice of your ring members is based not just on their skills and knowledge, but on their personalities and personal agendas.

You may choose to change which of your nobles serve on the ring whenever you wish, though your people usually prefer a fairly stable government. Since initial ring membership is random, you'll probably want to rearrange your ring early in the game, then leave it until given a reason to make additional changes. Sometimes the game forces you to change ring membership by the death of one of the members or as the result of a decision you made in response to an event. Or you may wish to replace aging ring members with younger nobles. The appearances of your characters really do age as the years progress and noble children reach adulthood and are added to those characters available to you. Members of your ring will often advice you to add a follower of a particular deity in order to gain a benefit that they think you need. This can be helpful if you are unfamiliar with the game or if a new noble has just become available, but it can be annoying if no such person exists.

There are some problems with the randomizer for generating new nobles, so you will often find yourself without any worshipers of a particular deity whom you wish represented on the ring. This is understandable, if frustrating, with the more obscure deities, like the trickster god, but it

took 40 years for me to find a follower of Orlanth who is supposed to be the most worshiped of the three major deities. That seems a bit odd, even though my clan is dedicated to Elmal, the sun god. Having a worshiper of a particular god on the ring will give you benefits when dealing with that deity and often with their sphere of influence, as well. Your chief should be a follower of your clan's primary deity if possible as this gives you an extra point of magic during Sacred Time. It is recommended that you keep representatives from seven different deities on your clan ring as the benefits the deities grant are not cumulative and it gives you a better chance of success with heroquests.

Overall, I like the heroquests - reenactments of myths with one of your characters playing the role of the deity whose story it is. They include copies of all the myths that allow hero quests as well as many others, so previous knowledge of Glorantha is not necessary to perform them. Unfortunately, the "right" answers in the heroquests don't always match the ones given in the story, which can be somewhat confusing. Also, many of the results of your choices are determined randomly, so you may fail even if you give all the "right" answers, which can be frustrating, especially when it happens many times in a row. On the other hand, I do understand that they don't want heroquests to be too easy. From the point of view of the characters, these are major happenings and they tend to have long term, if not permanent effects on the game. You must also complete a minimum number of heroquests to win the game.

Other, less powerful, magic exists in the game too. There are the Sacred Time rituals performed during the last two weeks of the year to the exclusion of all other activity. (Though the game starts in Sacred Time.) Your clan magic is renewed and you are allowed to spend it on different aspects of your clan life to improve probabilities in that area. For instance, spending magic on Children causes your people to have more

offspring and spending it on War increases the odds of your winning any battles that your clan gets into. The amount of magic you can put into each category depends on whether you are a Peace, War or Balanced clan and on which deities are represented on the clan ring. You can also save magic for use during the year or for future years. Many events may change how much magic your clan has and you may get some from other clans as repayment of a favor.

Maintaining a high total can give you bonuses in getting the gods' attention with sacrifices or completing heroquests. Sacrificing to the gods can be used to learn new blessings or myths or to ask for them to activate a blessing for you with a one year duration. If you build temples to the gods, each one can maintain 1-3 blessings, depending on the size of the temple. You may change which blessing to use whenever you wish, as long as you know that blessing. Temples require annual sacrifices to maintain, but the game takes care of this automatically, right before Sacred Time, so it does not take any actions.

The game tracks the livestock of your clan. Cows are most important, since they represent your clan's wealth and your oxen are used to plow the fields. Horses are used by your nobles and weaponthanes to ride into battle, so they are important too, but huge numbers give no extra value. Sheep and pigs are considered to be much less important, so not much attention is paid to them. However, all the deities except one require sheep to be sacrificed to them annually if you wish to maintain temples to them. While your traders can acquire more sheep in their behind the scenes trading, there is no reliable way of intentionally getting more. There isn't even a fertility blessing specifically for sheep, like there are for all the other animals.

There is a lot of interaction with the other clans of Dragon Pass. Some of it is hostile, but there is also trade, gift giving and marriages. The goal of the short game is to form a group of clans into a tribe and have

one of your characters be king or queen of the tribe for ten years. In the long game, you must form all the tribes into a kingdom and have your character become king or queen of all Dragon Pass. Doing this can be difficult. In the only long game I've had time to play, I was only given one chance to unite the tribes which was to support an NPC who wished to be Queen and had omens against her success. All the major events that occur during your game will be recorded in a saga, starting with your pre-history choices, so you can go back and look at previous years at any time. Every time you save the game, the saga is saved in a text file. When the game ends, you will be given the option to save the game so that you can keep the text file of the completed saga. There are bug fixes available on the website, but we'd have to uninstall the program and reinstall it fully on the hard drive to use them, so we haven't tried them. Overall, I have enjoyed the game and intend to try again at the long version in the hopes of winning it.

Comments on Issue #35

The Guest

What happened to Josh Caufield's second story? He started by saying, "I have two stories," but I only see one.

In the photo, Bonnie was holding the replica of Methos' sword as if she were threatening to behead me. Unfortunately, the sword didn't show up very well in the black and white scans. However, the sword wasn't sharpened and it wasn't actually touching me. If it had been sharp, I would have been in more danger in the first photo where I was balancing it on my shoulder.

Most of the dialogue in "Matilda's Story" is taken directly from the tape of the gaming sessions. I only changed things if they looked/sounded awkward or I couldn't make out what they were saying. So the players of the various characters involved in the conversations (or Joe in the case of the NPCs) "wrote" the dialogues, I just edited them. I don't know how long it will take me to finish chapter 2, but I'll print it here when I do.

Refugee

I take it that none of the personae from the kids' home have run into alternate Earths before. I've noticed that they keep trying to figure out how someone transformed the entire world (plus Mars now) while they were gone, but not once have considered the possibility that the Tunnels of Time might have sent them "sideways" in time.

The Sign of the Dancing Priestess

How do you define an unfinished work? When I send a story to a beta-reader, I consider it to be unfinished, but I'm actively looking for advice on how to improve it. Conversely, once I finish a story and publish it, I'm not planning to change it, so even the most helpful of advice will only benefit future stories. However, by the time I show a story to a beta-reader, I've usually written all the scenes that I currently believe that I need, named all the characters and otherwise filled in the obvious holes in my rough draft. Of course, suggestions from my beta-readers often result in adding new scenes to remedy problems that they find.

The Real McCoy

Congratulations. When are you due?

The Swashbuckling Mage Rides Again

I like the idea of changing the publication schedule to bi-monthly. I don't think it will change how much I write in terms of articles and comments, since those are based on whether or not I have
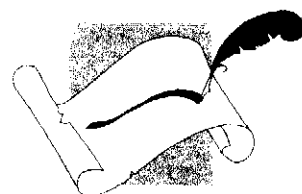
something to say. But cons that I attend and things I wish to review are limited in number and I can only write so many stories a year. So my average page count per issue would be higher with a bi-monthly schedule. It doesn't follow that it would be higher than it currently is because I've been publishing already written material and I'm running out of that. I don't know how to get them, but I think we need more writers. While I enjoying writing for IR, I dislike being pressured into finding something to fill up pages every issue because people outside the household aren't producing enough.

Asking IR readers to buy us a new printer doesn't make sense to me. If we're having trouble convincing people to pay for a paper APA, they're not going to want to pay for an electronic one. However, I do most of my reading on the bus going to and from work, so I want it either on paper or easily printable in a readable fashion.

Tangled Webs
by Cynthia A Shettle
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* * * * *

Duncan and Amanda were just preparing to leave the barge when both felt the uncomfortable, undefinable and unmistakable sensation that indicated the approach of another Immortal. As they looked at each other, Amanda asked playfully, "Expecting anyone?"

Silently shaking his head, Duncan turned his gaze to the stairs. The tall man with the black pony-tail moved his hand to his sword hilt, but he did not actually draw the weapon. His body tensed, preparing to spring into action.

Amanda watched the stairs just as warily, but her stance was more relaxed. Amanda knew that if the intruder was hostile, Duncan would protect her whether she wanted him to or not. He seemed inclined to forget that she had been taking care of herself for centuries before Duncan was even born. While she was quite willing to use this to her advantage, it could get irritating at times.

The cheerful curly-haired blonde who did enter practically bounced down the stairs in his enthusiasm. "Duncan, old chum, how have you been keeping yourself?" He paused at the bottom of the stairs, having caught sight of Duncan's companion. "And who is this vision of loveliness?"

Duncan had relaxed at his friend's entrance and gave him a smile now. "Galan, this is Amanda. Amanda, meet Galan Fairfax."

Galan stepped towards the female Immortal and made a show of kissing her hand. "Charmed to make your acquaintance."

Amanda returned the smile as she looked over the flamboyant man in front of her, trying to decide if Galan was always this way or if he wanted something from herself and Duncan. Galan was of medium height

and athletic build. He appeared to have stopped aging in his early twenties and his features still carried a bit of boyish charm. "Well, we were just about to leave for dinner." Amanda looked at Duncan, uncertain whether or not to invite the new arrival to accompany them.

"What luck, I'm just in time." Galan beamed at his fellow Immortals. "My band is playing at Belladone tonight and I was hoping you could come hear us. They serve food there. It may not be as extravagant as wherever you were planning to go." He gave a brief look of apology before continuing with his usual smile. "But it is certainly more than edible."

"We have reservations," Duncan started to explain.

"A concert sounds like fun and reservations can be canceled. Where's your sense of spontaneity?" Amanda teased.

Duncan sighed, knowing he was defeated. "Just give me a few minutes to call the restaurant." Duncan hoped that he didn't regret this. Things that Amanda considered fun usually resulted in trouble and Galan's concerts didn't always go as planned.

****

Dream Mirrors, Galan's band, was setting up their equipment. Well, Harvey Ransley was setting up the equipment. The band itself was doing more supervising than actual work, but Harvey had said that he wanted the job and a bit of menial labor wasn't a big deal, even if it wasn't a proper application of his talents. Overall the benefits of this job continued to outweigh the defects, even though those defects included taking orders from Fairfax. Harvey knew that he could fix things if he ever felt the need.

Everyone looked up as they heard a shout. "Hey guys! Come on over!" Galan Fairfax had just entered the club and was walking towards them with a man and a woman that they didn't recognize. The band headed over, but Harvey just waved and reluctantly returned to his work.

Galan waved back to the sandy-haired man. "That's our roadie, Harvey Ransley," he informed his fellow Immortals.

"Why does a night club act have a roadie?" Amanda wondered.

Galan shrugged. "I can't have the spotlights and publicity of the real stars, but there's no reason why I can't enjoy some of the trappings. Harvey volunteered for the job five years ago and I haven't had reason to regret hiring him since."

"Hey boss, what's up? These friends of yours?" The man had an American accent and his eyes, like those of the rest of the band, quickly migrated to the form-fitting mini-dress worn by the female Immortal and the shapely legs below it.

"This is Duncan MacLeod and... Amanda." The band leader suddenly realized that he didn't have a last name for her. While many Immortals predated the common use of surnames, they typically adapted or invented something for the sake of the mortals they interacted with.

One of the band members lifted his eyes from her figure to her face and smiled. "Nice to meet you."

"These are Cody Newman..." Galan indicated the man who had just spoken and Cody nodded. Indicating the others in turn, Galan continued, "And Melvin Wainwrite, my guitarists and Stanley Kirkwood, my drummer." The other band members nodded at the sound of their names, though Melvin failed to look up. Galan smiled at this. He wouldn't mind looking at Amanda all night either, but then she wouldn't get to hear them play. "Come on, I'll ask the manager to give you his best table and then I have to get up on stage. We're going to be starting soon." He

indicated for his guests to follow and then, not waiting to see if they did, headed off into the club.

The band watched the three Immortals leave before returning to the stage. Harvey was putting the finishing touches on the setup. He looked up at the sound of their footsteps. "Who were they?"

Melvin looked smug. "That was Amanda."

"The guy was Cloud, I think." Cody paused, trying to remember. "Dustin Cloud. Something like that."

Stanley shrugged. "They're friends of the boss. You can ask him when he gets back."

The musicians were busy putting on guitars and picking up drumsticks, so they missed the flash of recognition in Harvey's eyes as he reconstructed the mangled name of Galan's friend. Likewise, no one noticed that he spent most of the evening staring at the night club's best table.

****

Adam Pierson was at Watcher Headquarters this morning, though he was beginning to regret agreeing to give Joe a ride. Adam had lost count of the number of lectures he had already had to endure about the CD copy of his and Don's computer database and not everyone was here yet. While none of the Area Coordinators gathering from all over Western Europe had outright accused Adam of killing Vemas, a couple had come pretty close.

"We're going to be several hours, at least. You don't have to wait for me."

Adam smiled at the man who stood nearby, leaning on his cane. Joe might not fully understand why Adam had created the database, but he at least realized that it wasn't entirely Adam's fault that Kalas had gotten hold of a copy. "It's okay. I've certainly survived a lot worse."

"I guess you have." Joe returned his smile. "But you still probably have better things to do today. I have your home number. I'll give you a call if I need you for anything."

Adam nodded. "Okay. I'll see you tonight then."

As Adam approached the door, he saw a man just entering the building, looking around uncertainly. Glancing at the man's exposed wrist, Adam noted without surprise that tattooed on it was a blue circle surrounding a sort of "V" that curved out to meet the sides rather than the top of the circle. Adam pulled up his sleeve to reveal the matching tattoo adorning his own wrist.

The visitor visibly relaxed. "I wasn't certain I had the right address," he explained with a smile. "I'm Harvey Ransley."

"Adam Pierson." He reached out to shake Harvey's extended hand. As their skin touched, Adam felt something much too faint to be another Immortal, more a vague feeling of wrongness. It was so faint and so unnatural that Adam would have thought he was imagining it except for one thing. He had felt it before and the last time it had turned out to be right.

Completely unaware of just whose hand he had been shaking, Harvey said a little hesitantly, "I heard about Vemas, so I'm not sure who to report to."

"The meeting's in the conference room." Adam pointed back the direction he had come from. "It's..."

"Meeting?" Harvey interrupted.

"The meeting to choose the nominees for Regional Coordinator. That's not why you're here, is it?"

Harvey shook his head. "I'm Galan Fairfax's Watcher. We arrived in Paris yesterday evening and I thought I'd check in. Who's acting coordinator at the moment?"

"Joe Dawson has been for the past week. Seacouver isn't in Western Europe, but he was here and already involved."

"Involved..." Harvey repeated. "Wait a minute. You're Adam Pierson!"

Adam nodded cautiously.

"The one who made the CD database that Kalas found." Harvey sounded excited.

Adam watched the other Watcher carefully as he responded. "I programed the database, but I wasn't actually the one who copied it onto the CD."

"Even better." Harvey smiled at Adam. "I think that the database itself was a great idea. It just needed better security."

Adam was in perfect agreement with the younger man. The database actually had a good security system when it was turned on; it was just that Don refused to deal with it. However, Adam was prevented from taking an instant liking to Harvey Ransley by the uneasy feeling that the mortal had given him. In fact, when he tried, Adam could still feel it hovering at the very edge of his Immortal senses.

Keeping both sets of emotions from his expression, Adam just shrugged. "It doesn't matter what anyone thinks of the database anymore since the only copy got destroyed."

Harvey stared at Adam for a moment, as if he suspected Adam of keeping a copy for himself. Then he shook himself out of it. "I'd better get going if I want to catch

Dawson before the meeting."

Adam watched him disappear into the main room. He recalled noticing some oddities in Galan Fairfax's most recent Chronicles and now had a suspicion as to why. Well, he had several hours before anyone would be looking for him. That was plenty of time for a little research.

****

The meeting was not going well. No one seemed able to agree on anything. Joe had tried to restore order, but that had generated the response that he should go back to Seacouver, where he belonged. It did, however, pause the arguments for long enough for people to realize that they were tired, hungry and getting nowhere, so they had called a recess until the next morning.

While the other Watchers would probably be friendlier under the less stressful environment of a restaurant, Joe had decided that he would still prefer Adam's company for the remainder of the evening. A tall young man entered the room, glanced around, smiled and headed towards Joe, or at least that's what it looked like. Adam was actually young in appearance only, but Joe still had trouble accepting just how old he really was. Adam didn't really seem like an Immortal at all most of the time, let alone the oldest man in the world. Until Adam had decided to demonstrate his healing ability for Christine, Joe hadn't been completely convinced that this wasn't some sort of warped joke that Duncan and Adam were playing on him.

Adam noted his friend's expression. "Rough day?"

Joe shrugged. "I've had better." He didn't really want to talk about it.

Adam seemed to accept this and led the way to his car with Joe effortly matching the easy-going pace of the Immortal. As they opened the car doors, Adam asked carefully, "How much do you know about Harvey

Ransley?"

"Galan Fairfax's Watcher?" Joe got into the car. "Not much. He was asking me a few questions about MacLeod and Amanda this morning, but Fairfax met with both of them last night, so that's normal. Since our assignments interconnect at the moment, he offered to help me out while I'm busy with these meetings." He looked at Adam apologetically. "I know that that may inconvenience you, but I didn't have a reason to turn him down."

Adam nodded his understanding and looked out the windshield at the last stragglers from the meeting as they climbed into a newly arrived cab. "I don't trust him."

Joe sounded puzzled. "Any particular reason? He seemed friendly enough when I met him."

Adam sighed and looked at the man in his passenger seat. "I think he's one of Horton's."

Joe shook his head. "He only met Horton once or twice at the most. What basis do you have for this accusation?"

The real reason was because James Horton was the other person who had given Adam that feeling of wrongness. Even if the two Watchers had no actual affiliation with each other, Ransley *was* killing Immortals. However, Adam had no desire to advertise just how much more acute his own senses were compared to those of an average Immortal. "Have you seen Fairfax's recent Chronicles?"

"I glanced through one six years ago when he was in Seacouver for a week."

Adam shook his head. "The odd stuff started five years ago, when Ransley started watching him." He looked at Joe. "There are records of eleven kills in the three years after that. Ten of those were Fairfax's friends and his motivations for turning on them are

sketchy at best."

"And the past two years?"

"Ransley still has that Chronicle."

"And you think he's been killing Fairfax's friends?"

Adam nodded. "At least some of them. He's using Fairfax as a scapegoat to cover his own tracks. And by following someone who travels a lot, he has an excuse to go places to find new victims."

"You think MacLeod's his next target?"

Adam nodded.

Joe sighed. "I'll tell you what. You give me what you have on Fairfax and I'll see if I agree with your assessment of him."

That wasn't quite what Adam had been hoping for, but it was probably as good as he was going to get. He nodded. "I still have most of the stuff from Don's store at my house. I'll bring you there after dinner."

****

In the car the next morning, Joe told Adam, "I looked at the Chronicle last night after you dropped me off. While I agree with you that it looks a little odd, it isn't nearly enough to convict him. Immortals have been known to go insane before." Joe sighed. "It would help if you had more evidence."

Adam nodded. A vague feeling of wrongness probably wouldn't count as evidence in anyone's mind but his own, even if he chose to share the information. He needed something else. Adam could ask around at headquarters this morning and maybe find someone who knew something useful.

****

Upon arriving at headquarters, Mallory Tillard noticed Leal talking to Pierson. Leal Bettencourt was a mutual friend of his and Harvey Ransley's, but a firm believer in the non-interference policy of the Watchers. Mallory wondered what he could possibly have to talk to Pierson about.

Wandering close enough to catch fragments of their conversation, Mallory discovered that they were talking about Ransley. Mallory didn't like that one bit. He tried to figure out why Pierson was so interested in the man newly arrived from out of town. Maybe he was trying to recreate that illegal database of his so another Immortal could find it?

Shaking his head, Mallory dismissed the idea. Pierson was too smart and too sneaky. He wouldn't be so obvious about gathering information for his database, especially now when the events were still fresh in everyone's minds. Then it hit Mallory with a sharp intake of breath. Pierson knew! Somehow, that nosy, trouble-making researcher had found out that Ransley was after MacLeod.

Mallory knew that Pierson was friends with Dawson and while other people were dismissing MacLeod's entrance into headquarters as a fluke caused by the impending doom, Mallory was certain that Dawson and MacLeod had a long standing friendship. For that matter, Pierson himself was probably friends with MacLeod. There was no mention of the Scottish Immortal in the police reports, but someone must have delayed Kalas for long enough for Pierson to make the call. Ransley had to be notified.

Quickly Mallory dialed the number that Ransley had given him yesterday. Ransley picked up on the third ring. "Hello."

"Ransley, we're in trouble. Pierson was asking about you. I think he knows."

"Knows what?" Harvey Ransley was clearly confused.

"About..." Mallory glanced around the room. No one appeared to be listening to him, but there were people close enough to overhear. "You know."

Harvey sighed. "Don't worry about it."

"But..."

"I don't think he knows anything. Don't worry about it," Harvey repeated and hung up.

Mallory stared at the silent phone for a moment. Ransley refused to believe him. Then it occurred to Mallory that he could take care of Pierson himself. He didn't have the courage to face an Immortal on his own or he would have rid the Earth of Ignace Benoit a long time ago. However, Pierson was mortal and, in spite of his rebellious streak, fairly non-aggressive. Making sure that he didn't expose them should be easy.

****

Adam was taking a walk, feeling a cool breeze off the Seine brush against his skin and trying not to think about Ransley for a short while. It wasn't really working. When Kalas entered Adam's life and ended Don's, he had disrupted Adam's sense of inner peace. Adam hadn't fully recovered it when Kalas intruded yet again. Now Kalas was dead, but new events conspired to drag Methos back into the Game.

The fact that his current problem was with another Watcher, rather than another Immortal, should have made it easier to deal with in that respect, but it didn't. It only made the problem more firmly Adam's, especially since, at the moment, no one else even believed there was a problem.

Adam's attempts to find evidence of Ransley's activities had been met with no more success than the Area Coordinators seemed to be having at choosing a new

Regional Coordinator. In all his searching, he had only turned up one relevant fact, which was that Ransley's three assignments before Fairfax had all lost their heads a few months after he started watching them.

That was still just circumstantial evidence, even if Adam could show the relevant Chronicles to Joe. Unfortunately, Adam didn't have them or a logical reason to ask for them and Adam didn't want to confess to his actual source for the information. Joe might be more liberal in terms of Adam's database than most of the Watchers, but he probably wouldn't like the fact that Adam secretly still had a copy on his computer, even with all the security Adam had protecting it.

Adam's thoughts were interrupted by someone calling his name.

"Adam! Wait up!"

Adam stopped walking and turned to face the man approaching him, a Watcher he had seen around headquarters many times. Mallory Tillard thought that the Immortal he was assigned to follow was scum of the Earth and made no pains to hide this from the other Watchers. While Benoit's habit of periodically killing mortals when they got in his way didn't put him in Kalas's class, Adam could certainly see Mallory's point of view on the matter.

Unfortunately, this was Mallory's first assignment, so his experience with Immortals was limited and he had decided that all Immortals were like Benoit. Adam had tried a few times to convince him otherwise, but Mallory was as reluctant to let go of an idea as he was eager to come up with one in the first place. Adam thought that Mallory could probably be converted if he was given a new, better, assignment, but Adam wasn't certain how to arrange that.

Mallory stopped a few feet from Adam and shifted uncomfortably under the researcher's questioning gaze. "I heard you talking about Harvey Ransley this morning."

"Yes?" Adam looked at Mallory carefully.

"Well, I, um, was just sort of wondering why."

Adam had trouble believing this since Mallory's tendency to jump to conclusions had almost certainly come up with a theory by now. Mallory was probably looking for confirmation. "I was just making casual conversation," Adam lied smoothly, though futilely.

"You don't think that Ransley is up to something that you're investigating?"

"Why would I think that?" Though outwardly, Adam appeared puzzled, inside his heart was racing. This was not a good time for Mallory to suddenly start guessing correctly with his wild assumptions. Since Ransley really was up to something, Mallory could get both himself and Adam in a lot of trouble if he wasn't careful.

That set Mallory back for a moment. He couldn't think of any way that Pierson could know, but since it was obvious that Pierson did know, he must have some piece of information that Mallory wasn't aware of. Pierson might be blind about some things, but he was far from stupid. If Pierson had figured out about Ransley before he had sufficient evidence to convince anyone else, then Dawson and MacLeod still hadn't been told and Mallory was in time to prevent them from ever finding out.

Adam didn't think he liked the sudden flash of inspiration he saw in Mallory's eyes. He considered the possibility that the young Watcher was working with Ransley, but decided that it was unlikely. Mallory might not like Immortals, but he was too scared of them to try to kill one. The fact that Benoit was still among the living was proof enough of that.

Mallory started to reach for the gun hidden under the jacket that it was really too warm to be wearing, but hesitated. Pierson's expression didn't give anything away, but Mallory still didn't like the way the researcher was looking at him. Mallory had never killed anyone before and his mind was filling with all the things that could possibly go wrong. Also, while he didn't like Pierson, Mallory didn't really hate him either. Pierson was young and confused, not actually evil and he did at least try to be friendly when he wasn't preaching about Immortals being nice people.

Shifting uncomfortably, Mallory mumbled, "Sorry to bother you," and shuffled off the way he came.

Watching Mallory leave, Adam decided that he didn't like his sudden change of heart. Something was definitely wrong with the younger Watcher. Unfortunately, he couldn't really deal with whatever it was right now without the risk of dragging Mallory into Adam's own problems. He would just have to hope that whatever Mallory's new inspiration was, it would keep him out from underfoot for a few days.

After Ransley was taken care of, Adam could ask Joe's assistance in getting Mallory a better assignment. Joe would probably decide that included asking a certain Scotsman to dispose of Mallory's current assignment. From an ethical standpoint that would be only marginally better than Adam taking care of Benoit himself. While there were times when breaking the rules was necessary or sometimes even desired, Adam wasn't certain that this was one of them. The decision required more thought than he could really afford at the moment. It could wait until the more urgent problem was taken care of. Mallory was out of sight now and Adam turned to head home.

****

Mallory hadn't gone very far before he started to regret leaving. He may not want to kill Pierson, but that didn't change the fact that he had to in order to protect Ransley and himself. If he didn't do it soon, Pierson would warn Dawson and MacLeod, especially now that Mallory had admitted that he knew Pierson was on to them. By the time that Mallory had convinced himself to try again, Pierson was nowhere in sight.

Pierson was on foot and Mallory knew where he lived, so he could probably find him again. Mallory set off to look for his fellow Watcher, reminding himself not to talk to the enemy this time. He knew he would never be able to shoot Pierson if he had to look him in the eyes while he did so.

****

The silencer on the gun prevented Adam from hearing the shot, but he felt the pain as the bullet slammed into his back on its way to his heart. Shortly thereafter, a second pain appeared in his left shoulder from a not quite as lucky shot. "Good thing it's not my sword arm," was his last conscious thought.

****

Adam woke up with his face in the dirt. He thought he could hear footsteps fading in the distance, but it was hard to estimate how far away they were. The pain was much much closer. Adam's back hurt. His chest hurt. It hurt to breathe. That last part seemed odd. Adam didn't remember the bullets puncturing his lungs. It had been a long time since Adam had felt this much pain. He didn't die very often. Adam tried to remember when the last time had been, but could only recall faked deaths that had occured on paper only, enabling him to switch identities.

Realizing that his thoughts were drifting, Adam forced himself to remember the outside world. He strained to locate the footsteps, but couldn't hear them any more. Everything seemed quiet. Adam gave up on
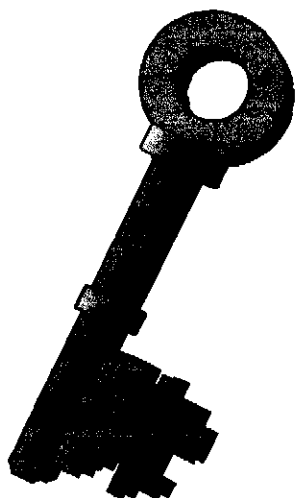
focusing past his pain and changed his tactic, focusing on it instead. An Immortal's metabolism worked faster when more quickening was available to it. Adam's system had automatically registered the increased need for energy and tightened its grip on his quickening, causing more to remain in his body and less in his aura. It was not as efficient as it could be, but with a little effort and a lot of experience, Adam could concentrate a portion of the extra energy in his body on the injured area, thereby speeding the healing process even further.

That was much better. Adam's shoulder was outside the area he had been concentrating on and it still ached a little, but it was a fairly minor injury in comparison and had nearly healed on its own. Adam decided not to worry about it as he slowly sat up and looked around. There was no sign of his assailant or any witnesses to the event, but he did see his wallet lying on the ground beside him.

Adam picked the wallet up and leafed through it. While his money, credit cards and bank cards were missing, everything else had been left behind. The missing money implied that it was supposed to look like a mugging, but the fact that the wallet had been left behind indicated that it wasn't. Someone with no interest in the contents would have taken it to go through at their leisure and dispose of elsewhere. The most likely reason to leave it with Adam would be to insure that his body was identified when found.

A quick search of his pockets revealed that his keys were missing. Since the thief had not bothered to take anything with Adam's address on it and the keys were useless without knowing what they opened, this implied that the person who had taken them already knew where Adam lived. Of course, Mallory did know where Adam lived and he was the only person Adam could think of who had a motive to kill him.

This meant that Mallory was probably working with Ransley after all. In retrospect, Adam could see how Mallory might believe that there was safety in numbers and feel more comfortable going up against Immortals if he had help. However, Adam wasn't certain why Ransley and the other renegade Watchers would put up with Mallory. His attack on Adam couldn't have been sanctioned by Ransley. Mallory's evidence against Adam was even flimsier than Adam's evidence against Ransley and that was insufficient to convince anyone except Adam. From what Adam had heard, Horton had expected blind obedience to, and a willingness to die for, his cause. Mallory displayed neither. The renegades must be getting desperate for members.

Adam rubbed his neck as it occurred to him just how close he had come to losing his head. What had saved him was the fact that, contrary to what one would expect from a five thousand year old Immortal, he had left his sword at home. Adam had been at Mallory's mercy for long enough for the Watcher to search both him and his wallet. If there had been the slightest evidence that Adam was an Immortal for Mallory to find... Adam shuddered. Next time he faced Mallory and Ransley, they would know.

Like it or not, Methos was going to need his weapon before this was over. Looking down at the half dozen blood stained holes where the bullets had passed all the way through his body, it occurred to the Immortal Watcher that a shower and change of clothes wouldn't hurt either. He rose to his feet and started home, hoping that he could be there and gone before Mallory arrived.

Continued next issue...

The Real McCoy

Topic A : Game Mechanics, Genre or Universal?

Now this puts me square in the fork of a dilemma -- I admit freely that my first real love was GURPS. Yes, I had a fling with Chaosium's *Elfquest* RPG, and a few dates with D&D, but GURPS was the steady romance, ever since I read the section on disads in the Basic Set and designed a fighter-mage. With Split Personality. The kind where one was the fighter and the other was the mage and they didn't know about each other. The fighter wanted to get to her father's merc company and hunt down the people who'd killed her family (yadda, yadda) while the mage just wanted to get back to her nice little hedge-witch job in a small village. Never played her, but the concept of a system where disads existed in wonderful rows of character-generating ideas... Yum!

(As an aside, yes, I tend to define a character by her (or his) disads first. Then secondarily by advantages and skills. But picking the disadvantages is always the way I get to *know* the character.)

I adore the universal aspect of GURPS. Not surprising, really -- the worldbook I and my spouse wrote, GURPS IOU, depends on being able to dump any assortment of funky character designs into the setting, and have them all interact with roughly the same mechanics. (For those of you who don't know, Illuminati "you're not cleared to know what the O stands for" University is a dimensional nexus "where Weirdness Magnet isn't a disad, it's a way of life.") I treasure the ability to make a character for a Space campaign with the same creation methods as one for a Fantasy campaign. Or a Fantasy-Ultratech campaign, or a Fantasy-Supers campaign, or a Traveller campaign...

Heck, I and the spouse are working on the GURPS translation for In Nomine!

And there's the fork. In Nomine (or, henceforth to save my fingers, IN) is, well, my joy and trial and frustration and exultation and pride and pain and a lot of other things. I mean, we're talking emotionally tied up in it a lot of the time! (Something about having my name attached to all of the stuff as "Line Editor," I guess! O;>) And IN is most *definitely* a specific-genre system. Heck, it doesn't even model humans within the game very well! But translating it into GURPS showed me that there are a lot of cool mechanics that are really *hard* to translate! The first clue, we thought, was with Forces -- they're great for IN. They're the building blocks of the soul, and the

way they're set up makes it really hard to min-max around the way I'd learned to do with GURPS. (Min-maxing is as much fun to me as playing the resulting character; it's weird and hard to explain, but once the numbers are crunched and made to scream, I happily go on to role-play!)

The real bear, though, was Essence. Essence is what powers supernatural abilities in IN. But your Essence total is dependant on how many Forces you have -- and we had to get rid of Forces (replacing them with forms of Power Investiture) for GURPS IN. I think we've fixed something up that works now, but it was a *mess* for a while.

Another cool bit for IN is the "check digit." Skills are based on a 2-12 scale, rolled on 2 dice. The check digit, the third die, is the degree of success or failure (1 is small, 6 is large). It's a little annoying in that how good you are has only an indirect effect on how good your successes (or how minor your failures) are, but there are some advantages as well -- you need only tell if you *made* the roll or not, and then tell the GM, "check 3" or something. And it makes it very easy to use the "d666" -- if you roll a 111, it's a Divine Intervention (like a critical success for angels, or a critical failure for demons, only cooler and with more SFX) and if you roll a 666, it's an Infernal Intervention (critical failure for angels, critical success for demons, with lots of brimstone and SFX).

IN's mechanics help a lot with the flavor of IN; only time will tell if we managed to capture enough of that flavor in GURPS. (Which did, in the end, live up to its "universal" label -- once we got the go-ahead to invent some new, IN-specific advantages and disads!)

The only other time I'd really met that fork was the one-shot Werewolf game I was in. I designed the character in GURPS (using the GURPS W:TA book), and then tried to back-convert to WW. Turns out that's a pretty lousy thing to do, since one winds up with uber-WW characters! (The GURPS ones are just more competent!) I decided that I liked GURPS better that time. (But that may just be because I hate rolling umpty dice and losing them under the couch.)

As yet another note, that experience is why I was and am fanatic about including GURPS-to-IN conversion notes as well as the IN-to-GURPS ones. Fortunately, it turns out that GURPS converts to IN pretty well, for 100 point characters. (I tested it on Dai Blackthorn, the sample character in the Basic Set, and several of our convention-pregen characters; one of the playtesters tested it on a character from GURPS Goblins!)

Ugh, I sound like ad-copy, don't I? Occupational hazard, I guess. One of the tasks of the LE involves coming up with blurbs for the books, and one of the tasks of the *editor* involves writing the back-blurbs for the books one is editing! Though I'm rather proud of the back-blurb for Superiors 2: Sins of the Flesh. I got in some True Thomas poetry. (About the broad and easy road...)

Topic B: Um... No clue. Probably won't change much. O:> Maybe more on-line games, such as in IRC, chat-MOO/MUSH/M*s, since those let gamers hook up even if there aren't gamers in the area.

Now, on to the comments! Since there were some questions in here, I'm probably going to wax, um, wordy!

As usual, RAEBNC for much stuff, though with this short an IR...

The Guest #26: (Sorry you're going to miss IR #36.) I loved the giant/critical failure story. That's *funny*! I am reminded (by my spouse) of one of the bits from the same session as the Dancing Anvil of Doom. It's definitely a No Plan: we landed above the secret enemy stronghold and started discussing how to attack them and smoke them out. We used a few spells to see through the earth and help make our plans. Right next to their air-vents. They heard us. (Doh!) Fortunately, my character was watching their entrance and noticed them pouring out to attack us, and then we simply drove them off with superior spellcasting and fighting skills. That's when we dropped the Priest-O-Matic on the second in command evil henchpriest. Indeed, Air Golem does go through Missile Shield. Anyway, that got remembered as the "who needs a plan; stand around talking until they attack, then beat them." O:>

You ask in your comments, "Which do you prefer, role-playing or writing?" I think the answer is "yes." To be more specific, though, I like role-playing and *fiction*-writing. Writing gaming stuff is sort of fun, but it doesn't tell a story in the same way as either of the other two. It's more a snapshot, which others can use to roleplay from. (And yes, I do tend to be busy! At least I'm not doing any editing at the moment...)

Regarding your comments to Collie, sympathies on having problems; when I've been guest-NPCing for my friend in her online chat-game, it's sometimes been tricky to keep from running the NPC like a player. I *hope* I do a reasonable job of that, but...

Refugee: Must...go...back...and...read...other...section...first! It started sucking me in despite the gap! (BTW, on the telepathic stuff, is there a difference between * and ** that I haven't noticed and should go back and check?)

Words on the Wing #6: Comments on my comments... Yeah, as a fiction-writer, I'd have utter cows if someone started messing with my immortal prose. Even if they just show me what they want to do, I really want to make those changes myself, even when I'd agree utterly with them and be going "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's great!" For writing gaming material... It really depends on the editor. A good editor, I can drop the stuff into his or her hands and say, "Here, it's yours," and trust that nothing will be messed with in a bad way. (For instance, I really trust SJ that way.) Clumsy sentences will be fixed, weird punctuation will be de-weirded, and subtle spelling gaffes get repaired. Admittedly, the better that one is at avoiding such in the first place, the less a (good) editor will do! A bad editor, ugh -- ESPECIALLY in fiction. My fiction is my baby!!

"Argument" depends a lot on tone, and a lot on the vision. Discussing changes in fiction, I'd say it's far more justified -- the author is the one with the vision, not the editor. It's my (possibly deluded; I don't do that sort of editing much!) opinion that in those cases, an editor is best suited to tightening up the work in more mechanical than conceptual ways, and finding outright contradictions ("waitaminute, you said in chapter 2 that your heroine hates spiders; what's she doing making friends with the arachnoid aliens first-thing??"). Insulting/angering your editor personally is never, ever a good idea -- at a minimum, it's going to taint how s/he looks at your work, and s/he won't be able to tell if the work is bad, or if she's just really, really angry with you and *nothing* you did would look good. (Tip: if you find that you've got an editor and you aren't agreeing, get another editor if you can. If you can't... Try to remain on friendly terms. Try really hard! It'll be easier on both you and the editor, and you'll get better work done.)

Discussing changes in gaming material... That's more dicey, since there's a good chance that you're trying to write to someone else's vision, and if the Line Editor disagrees with your vision of the line's vision... Well, the line has to have *somebody's* vision; letting every freelancer interpret things randomly really, really doesn't work. I've seen it. <shudder> One thing that I like to see in that sort of discussion is, "I'm trying to do X with this section that you want to change; can we do X without invalidating Y? What if I do it like Z?" A willingness to adapt one's vision to the line's, perhaps in a different way than either had intended at first, is an absolute deity-send. (GURPS is less prone to this than IN; a GURPS book can be a stand-alone, and you only really have to worry about getting the mechanics right. With IN, there's so much interwoven in the background and setting, that there are places where there is *no* room for an author to go around with! their grand vision about what it should look like -- because a few little changes will completely invalidate a lot of other material, both already-published and yet to be published! (Sort of like your fanzine editor not groking the ramifications of her changes to your story!) It's when an author won't accept that, that things get strained. Authors who do accept that, and do their best work even when they're in areas that they're having to conform to some other vision, are worth their weight in gold.)

Description is a hard thing to get right without interrupting the flow of the text! (I'm only barely learning to do it, and it's still something I have to do consciously.) And yes, the fact that you *don't* know what the players think the characters are thinking (and therefore can't write it down) makes it different from "pure" fiction, where the author can usually figure out what's going on in a character's head. This may be one reason why "gaming stories" often don't work well except as *really* fluffy material -- it's hard to identify with the characters because you can't get inside their heads. I suspect that gaming stories where one player writes it up, with their character as the protagonist, are easier to have the reader identify with -- instead of an "observer" viewpoint, it becomes a story with a viewpoint character.

I hope that the "accidental death" of the character didn't hurt too much! So far, I've only killed off a major character sort-of off-screen, in some of my fanficish stuff. The way I'd set it up, I had to do it, but I wound up feeling sorry for the wretch at the end. Which hopefully means that readers would, too!

True Magick #17: Wow, that sounds like a rather fun and convoluted game... I wish I could *run* games like that... (And yes, you should pick up a Bujold book -- maybe one at a library? As a friend said a while back, "I knew I shouldn't have done that. Now I have to read them ALL!" They really do tend to be addictive.)

Sign of the Dancing Priestess #6: Good luck taking over for your boss! The constructive criticism article seems very useful, especially for fiction-critiques. Showing solutions and asking questions -- asking questions is great. Asking for more detail can be good too -- "You say the heroine found a secret passage -- what about describing it more? How she found it?" ("Liz"? *sniffle* I usually go by "Beth" instead, if that's regarding me... Except for fencing teachers, for some obscure reason.) You're right about having less leeway to be gentle when doing gaming editing (I wouldn't know about fiction-editing!). Making alternate suggestions for something that doesn't work can be *very* useful, though -- it tells the author what the over-riding vision is, which can help them tell when they've gone astray. Sometimes that's hard, and one can only say, "No... that's not right. It needs to be more, hm, mystical somehow. The feel isn't saying the right thing." It's frustrating on both sides. (And is a good place for an *author* to keep calm and start asking questions, probably!)

Salome ©1996 Elizabeth McCoy

Regarding editors as control freaks... Well, Line Editors are! We have to be. Ditto book editors. Among other things, it takes an insane amount of egotism to tamper with someone else's work when we know how much we gnash our teeth at someone tampering with ours! (I'm still grumbling at some edits that Bob made on my work in Superiors 1! But I told him to do his job, and cuts needed to be made, and there's at least one swap that he asked for which made the work much better.) And then there's what I wrote to some friends... "You see, when one becomes an editor, they take out your heart, and they put it in a box. Then they put the box in a rabbit, and the rabbit in a fox, and the fox in an eagle, and the eagle is placed in a tree in a faraway land surrounded by impassable mountains and the mountains surrounded by rivers." (Yes, I read a book of Russian folktales once...)

Condolences on all the breakups! I think you're right, that expectations can do it, as well as personality issues -- having both of those in the same group almost guarantees a spectacular meltdown.

Good luck with the campaign stuff -- it sounds interesting, and I hope the bugs get shaken out. Ah, another person who hasn't yet found Bujold! You'd probably want to start with _Young Miles_ or _The Warrior's Apprentice,_ if you're into fantasy more -- the culture of Barrayar is sort of quasi-feudal, and both of those start there. (Young Miles combines Warrior's Apprentice and some of the other books in there.) She also has a fantasy book around, _The Spirit Ring_, but it's a bit harder to find and I found it slightly less engaging for some reason.

If you *really* wanted someone to do some editing on your work... It would depend on what else I had staring me in the face as "real work" at the time. O:> (I agree -- writing and role-playing tell a story, but in very different ways.)

<offer of virtual hug> Thank you, regarding Huntington. It still makes me sad, sometimes, thinking about how much I miss the little menace to society.

The Real McCoy: The art looks good, though the text for the Dancing Salome didn't come through very well. Soon you're going to have to start plundering the best of my "Sketches" folder, eh? O:>

Swashbuckling Mage #6: Ack, good luck on the computers. I wish I had any ideas for helping IR along; about all I know is that I loathe and detest PDF files for various and sundry reasons I won't go into. I would miss the "dead trees version" of IR. I wonder if enough of us have free cash that we could chip in and get IR a photocopier... Maybe I should see about sending you a couple of the stories that were just a leeeeeetle too "off" to go into PawPrints, about some characters from the GURPS Space campaign. Well, really, they're not PCs -- it's stories from the past, and the major characters are Moonfur's mother and aunt...

THE SWASHBUCKLING MAGE RIDES AGAIN #7
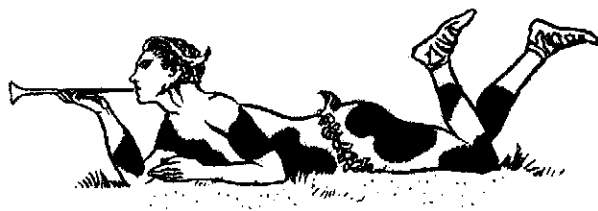
Personal Notes:

If you are reading this, then we have survived the Y2k hype and entered into the New Year, and are preparing for Arisia.

Kiralee will be sitting on panels this year, in her official capacity of Interregnum Editor, and I'll be acting as her marketing support (as always).

We're doing as much as possible to promote IR at Arisia. I've also done a mass mailing to about 40 convention organizers across the country, offering them our flyer exchange program, to help boost its usage. As you probably have noticed the number of convention flyers in recent issues has dropped considerably after the initial rush earlier in the year. Part of this is caused by the difficulty we're having being noticed by the search engines, and by the reduction of our visibility on various other gaming related web sites.

Our drop of net visibility is because we decided not to be absorbed or eaten up by many of the various pay sites, advertising supported web sites and similar commercially oriented directions that many folks are now taking (heck even the local www.bostongamers.com site is now seeking to become an incorporated site out to earn money off gaming. We don't want to be a big money operation, and don't want to lose our identity or ability to control our editorial policies here at IR and the fantasylibrary.com and by refusing to do so we are facing a certain amount of backlash from the folks that tried to consume us into their corporate content plans.

That's why I've done the mass mailing to the various conventions instead of waiting for them to contact us. It's a one-shot effort, if it draws us some flyer exchanges this can help boost us without any costs. If it fails nothing was lost but the time for the email.

Anyone who is going to be attending any other conventions and wants to circulate flyers and other promotional material for us, please drop me an email with a mailing address and I'll send along what I can.

I don't want IR to go softly into the night. I want it to survive and I need everyone's help to do this.

Sad News:

As I write this I just heard that Clayton Moore has passed away. For those unfamiliar with this gentleman, he was the voice of The Lone Ranger on Radio and later on Television. He will be missed.
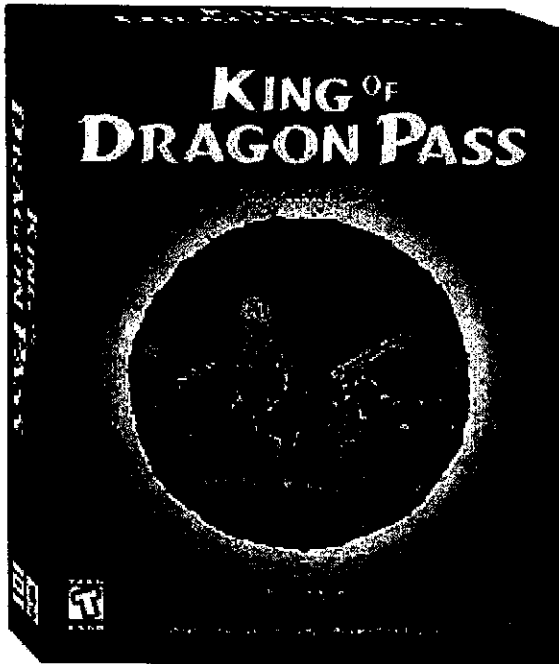
King of Dragon Pass (Review):

This computer game, which runs on both the PC and the Macintosh, is based on the Glorantha world setting created by Chaosium. Its published by A Sharp LLC, and is available from their own website (www.a-sharp.com) or from a number of online game and hobby shops and online merchants. It is not being sold in the standard computer store market, since it is oriented towards fans of Glorantha. (costs about $37.50).

We have David Dunham, a past contributor to Interregnum, for sending us review copies, as he's the technical contact for A Sharp these days.

This is not your standard first person shooter, nor a hack-n-slash or exploration game. Instead King of Dragon Pass is a turn based strategy game that takes you into the colonization of Dragon Pass by clan leaders, developing tribes, and hopefully unifying the tribes into a great kingdom.

It involves economic, political, magical and religious planning and effort. Over time it unfolds the myths of the gods of Glorantha and has you take members of the tribal councils into Heroquests where they re-enact the stories of the pantheon to develop new knowledge, power or gifts to help their tribe prosper.

Economics, politics (both internal and external), complex challenges of decision making, environmental problems, and warfare against other clans all come into play as one seeks to survive and develop the clan over 100 years into a tribe and then a kingdom.

The focus is literary on many levels, and as the game is played it records the events into a text file as a saga that can be printed for a record of your accomplishment.

Its not a fast game, it can take anywhere from 4 to 60 hours of time to play it out from my experience (there are two options, the full 100 year kingdom forming version, and a short 10 year version, but I preferred the 100 year version).

The graphics are not animated, but instead hand painted displays. The number of situations one might encounter are impressive, according to the literature there are some 450 interactive situations that may be encountered (but never all in the same playing) and the variety and complexity make it possible to play this game many times without becoming bored.

One feature is that its important to develop a Gloranthian mindset when playing - if you start placing modern ethics to your decision making you may find yourself in serious trouble with the gods early on. Additionally, if you concentrate too much on any one area (trade, warfare, politics, economic development, magical advancement, etc) then you will find that you will not do as well as you would if reasonably paying attention to everything on some level.

A number of personalities are given to you to choose a council, which presents advice and makes some decisions for you at various time in your efforts to rise to a throne. Some work in your favor, others may betray you, and others may prove to be highly argumentive along the way with your decisions.

This is one place where I think the program has a few problems, as one's council possibilities start as random, and it appears that each successive generation is less skilled then the previous. Additionally it is possible to have a tribe with a primary god or goddess that there are no followers of who have reached "personality" level that may serve on the council at the start (even though the tribe

tries to encourage the leader being of the primary deity, as do the mechanics).

Being a V.1 release the copy I got has a few bugs, but I've been told that bug fixes are available on the A Sharp website to download, if you are willing to install the game onto your hard drive (the shipped version allows you to play directly from the CD without using more than 1-2 meg of disk space for saga storage, a nice space saver).

I did manage to crash the game once out of 10 sagas, getting an error message, but the game was able to continue on afterwards without loss of my saga or too big a problem coming from the crash (I suspect it was a sound card or video card conflict that occurred, or a missing graphic it couldn't find on the CD).

Overall the game gets the feel of Glorantha down into a computer setting effectively and with enough diversity to keep one's attention time and again. The few bugs will probably be fixed quickly, and don't deter from the game. The only problem was that some things appear a bit too random in regards to the results from one's decisions, especially in regards to the council member personalities (but when you consider that in the real world how strange people can be, this may be more a feature than a problem with the game).

A good, solid game, and definitely one I would recommend to folks. It does have an ESRB rating of "Teen" (Realistic Violence, Suggestive Themes) but I would be quite comfortable with giving the game to a younger person (rather than a Shooter game or a Diablo Hack style game).

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The violence is not that violent when compared to most games on the market, and the suggestive themes are a matter of Gloranthan concepts of honor, marriage, and such which are presented in a manner that does not involve sexual terms or portrayals (but does present you with challenges of ethics of what to do when a bride is suspected of infidelity with a member of another tribe and whether to tell the prospective groom, who is being married as part of a political alliance between two tribes).

It comes with an extensive manual, which enhances play, but which you don't need to memorize or keep at hand at all times to reference (much of it tries to explain the setting to those who have never experienced Glorantha).

If you enjoy Glorantha, you'll like this game. If you enjoy computer games that are not mindless mouse clicking but make you think, you'll find this a definite improvement over many of the games on the market. I definitely plan on keeping it for playing on my machine, for when I have free time, as its worth the time investment to play.

Galaxy Quest (Movie Review)

This is the sort of parody film that folks will either find hilarious, insulting or mystifyingly silly, depending on what they know of the subject the parody is about.

Galaxy Quest is a spoof of Star Trek, done in such a way that the "powers that be" at Paramount can do nothing in the way of lawsuits against its creators to get a piece of the pie.

It opens at a Fan Convention for a long canceled, but syndicated in re-runs tv SF show about an intrepid starship captain and his crew (centering on the bridge officers), led by Tim Allen's character.

There's a token female officer (the only person who can get the computer to respond to her voice controls it later turns out, and thus her only function is to repeat commands to it from all the other officers, and to sometimes relay or explain what the computer is saying in response to them) who wears a tight fitting uniform with a healthy cleavage (played by Sigourney Weaver with her hair dyed blonde), a Black pre-teen pilot (now grown up, but thus filling the bridge positions of token non-white human and Westley Crusher wanna-be), A bumpy headed alien (Alan Rickman?) that is a cross between a pseudo-scientific vulcan with a Klingonesque overdeveloped sense of vengeance, and a Ship's engineer with no visible accent (and sort of a Jordy style "huggy-feely" management style).

Add in the chance meeting at the convention with a man who played a quick dying, first name only "Guy", crewman (#6) who was in

one episode and who has had no real acting career (just like the rest of the crew) since the show was canceled except at Sci-Fi cons, and you have the cast of GalaxyQuest.

The actors are having a crisis among themselves, feeling that the Captain is still getting all the limelight and doing interviews and bit pieces without them. The alien character's actor was once a shakespearian actor, and now finds himself (like the rest) horribly typecast in their parts. They are nearly at each other's throats at the gathering and ready to break apart as a team for good, possibly in public, so that they can escape their long-dead tv show's past.

The actor that plays the captain is approached at the convention by what he believes are a bunch of costumed fans who he is supposed to be doing a bit part voice over for a convention video portrayal of his character on the next day for some extra money on the side. As he discovers the next day, they were fans, but are from another world, and they believe he and the rest of his fellow actors are the real thing and want them to save them from a terrible conquering space villain.

As time goes on they discover that they picked up the original broadcasts of the show, believing them to be historical documentaries, and had transformed their entire culture and technology based upon the tv show, including wearing devices that make them appear human at all times, the nifty uniforms, and a ship built with controls based on the hand motions observed in the weekly tv episodes.

From there things charge along at a rapid and silly pace, with plenty of hidden star trek references (from both series).

All the characters come across in interesting manners (including some wonderful bits with the crewman #6 character that panics whenever he's left alone to do something or sent down with a landing party, since he knows that he could die in the first five minutes of either event as an inevitable victim of his having only one name).

Numerous scenes from the tv and movie versions of star trek are parodied along the way (including the famous taking of the ship out of the repair bay for the first time by the pilot).

As comedies go I think this one is definitely a winner and worth seeing.

Infernalism : The Path of Screams (Review)

This supplement is subtitled as *"A Tome of Black Magick for Mage : The Sorcerers Crusade™"* and is authored by Phil Brucato. ISBN 1565044959 (White Wolf; $18 US).

As usual I have an odd assessment of White Wolf's games. From an artistic viewpoint they are of an interesting design and many of them have joined my gaming shelf. From a GM/Player point of view I find their content valuable to draw from, but their mechanics leave much to be desired so that I would never utilize anything by them directly.

Additionally I find all their settings (not just the World of Darkness material) to be just too dark, too futile and just not fun to experience or portray.
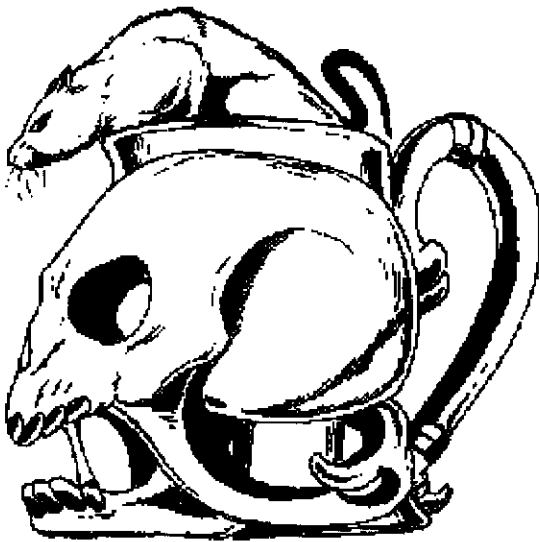
Despite these things I was drawn to get this book for our shelf, having skimmed it in the store, because much of it is a wonderful presentation of the sort of Medieval and early Renaissance view of the nature of so-called black magic, satanism and evil in general. It also includes some interesting historical bits about various underground cults, conspiracies and misconceptions of the time periods that can be adapted to other game worlds set in the same time period.

It is designed for use of creating antagonists for "good" mages to face in a campaign, including understandings of motivations and personalities that might be drawn into such dark dealings that are more than "I want power" or "I want revenge". It goes from this to explaining the various prices that a dark mage would pay for their rewards, the risks and a healthy listing of spells and abilities that they receive for their servitude to dark masters and other creatures that would be considered "evil" within the setting.

Its not a book without its flaws. There are places where the layout scrolls unexpectedly, as if a block of type was supposed to be set aside away from the rest and wasn't, but these are minor imperfections.

More objectionable is the appendix listing of "Dark Pagan Gods", a fabrication in many cases and in others an outright maligning of the nature of many Greek, Roman, Norse, Finnish and Celtic deities that even exceeds the worst opinions ever spouted by the Catholic Church in some cases.

The details of this book and the descriptions of magic spells and rituals are vivid in their descriptions and certainly would add to the atmosphere of any setting (not just Medieval) where a dark magi would be a fitting enemy to encounter. An example of a colorful spell to read or observe:

(P.86) "Endless Parchment : The witch priests of Ur concocted this foul rite, both as a punishment and as a source of writing material. A victim, spread-eagled for skinning, is prepared with unguents, incense and perfumed water. Minor demons are invoked (though not actually summoned), and the victim is flayed alive. As the Infernalist peels skin away, new skin grows over the raw muscles, enabling the Fallen One to flay the victim again, and again, and again.... [The systems behind this spell are obvious. We present it more for its horror value than for in-game utility.]"

The above was a simple entry, some entries go on for half a page or more in fine detail both in game mechanics and in regards to a horrific presentation for players.

Beyond the numerous spells , flaws, merits, abilities, prices, and character generation information there is also a lot of background material (including a description of many types of demons and organizations of infernal mages) that can be utilized within the context of mage or adapted to other settings and systems.

This is not a book for the squeamish, and is certainly intended for a mature audience that won't get offended by a bit of nudity in the art or an occasional "foul word". It lives up to its subtitle, and I would suspect would work well in its home setting. I also believe it can be adapted from to produce some horrific elements that are not to be found elsewhere, and to present some ethical challenges along the way for characters who encounter such practitioners of dark magical arts (a great thing to apply, for example, to a Bureau-13 campaign that needs a new twist, or an Illuminati Setting, or to enhance a Call of Cthulhu game with some new and mysterious magics that don't directly drive one insane, but which have their own prices for their power). A Solid 'B' product on the usual alphabet grade scale.

Chez Geek (Review):

This is the game that parodies the audience it was originally intended for - Chez Geek is the game of College and Post College Roommates, where everyone scampers about trying to make a living and earn enough "slack" to overcome the stress of daily life. Although its been a long time since our college days, our household continues onward with a structure that evolved from a roommate situation and thus we can certainly experience many of the things the game parodies.

Its produced by Steve Jackson Games (ISBN 1556344112) and the cards feature the artwork of John Kovalic of Dork Tower fame. It's intended for a mature audience, since there are passing references to sex, drugs and rock and roll, but nothing really offensive or blatant. (An episode of the tv show "friends" could easily be more offensive, and certainly less fun).

Two to Five players (more if you add a second deck) sit down at the table, and one is chosen as dealer. You will need a d6 to play.

Cards are of two general categories, Job cards and Life cards, which are kept in separate decks. Each player is dealt out a job card face up (you can't have a secret job). Your job card determines your Slack Goal Number, The amount of Free Time Actions that you get and the Disposable Income that you have each turn.

Some jobs also have an extra perk or disadvantage that come with them as well. Some jobs have a variable income (such as a

rating of 2/5) and a die roll is made on your turn to determine which you have for that turn (50% of the time it produces one result, 50% the other, if probability is nice to you on the dice).

Each person is dealt a hidden hand of Life cards. Life cards are of four kinds, which are color coded : Green for Person, Blue for Thing, Red for Activity and Orange for Whatever (Misc). The are recycled from the discard pile when the Life deck becomes empty.

Most cards are played on your own turn, a few allow you to slow down the other players (such as playing the Chainsaw card to cancel their sleep card - yes, you get points for sleeping!) And some do both (such as the cards that let you have "noisy nookie" which will both disrupt your roommates sleep AND earn you slack points.

A few interesting twists are built in, including guests that will not leave until they've eaten all the food or drink (which earn you slack while you have them) and the ability in a large group for two players to decide to be "dating" each other as significant others, increasing the effectiveness and probability of their having points for "nookie".

Overall the game is fast paced, fun, achieves its parody successfully and doesn't have any of the obsessive problems that come from some CCGs since its complete in one box.

I recommend this as a good group game, especially while waiting for your regular roleplaying group members to show up.

Game Mechanics, Genre or Universal?

One of the age old questions (at least since the 80s) is whether one should try to devise the "ultimate" Universal game mechanic, or to design mechanics that are for a specific genre or setting and reflect the tropes and idioms of that genre and setting.

Much of this has to do with the argument regarding the heroic, cinemagraphic, realistic or hyper-realistic concepts.

Things like how deadly should combat be? How accurate are firearms? Does the player need to know military tactics to play, or can they just roll against a tactics skill and see if they made a good plan? Do you really want to know the details of your injury, or is taking damage to an abstract number that when it hits 0 you're dead sufficient?

How detailed should your character be - does the system reflect the ability to produce characters that fit the setting accurately with the sufficient number of skills?

Personally, in recent years, I've taken a third approach in design, after having tried both specific systems and those that were universal styled (like GURPS, Rolemaster and Champions), because I find there's too much work to make a new mechanic for each setting (and I like to have cross-overs between settings) and that a purely universal system often fails to present one or more settings and tropes in a manner that seems "right" to players. {Champions for example is good for heroic, terrible for realistic; GURPS does a reasonable job at realistic, but fails for many heroic settings}. My third path is to build a very bare-bones mechanic and apply modules to it.

In a modular game, you insert the elements that are most part of the setting and tropes you are trying to present as it is presented. Thus if it is heroic, in a modular game, you put in mechanics that increase combat ending not in bloody corpses, but in knocked out opponents (this is a simple representation of the concept, you would want to add a lot more elements to achieve Heroic gaming).

The trick is to make the game diverse enough and to have enough module ideas to handle each situation that you can insert. Basically the bottom mechanic must be VERY limited, and the add-ons must be extensive.

FUDGE tried to develop this, by making a bottom end mechanic that was VERY limited, but it failed to have a wide enough range, and certainly not enough modular parts to make it work.

GURPS, in skilled hands, can be made to work this way, if you throw away may of the artificial rules and limits (including the far too few attributes that define a character's mind and body), and possibly the choice of dice (Despite claims to the contrary, bell curves from 3d6 or dice pools are not a great idea in way of game mechanics, as they can be easily abused in character design play).

If you can't build modular, then I would generally say that the best deal is build a specific system, but be sure it accurately represents the setting. Too many folks claim one thing and achieve another in their design, because they get caught up in the mechanic and forget the setting they are intending to emulate. (ex: folks who want a system that is heroic, but then put in instant-kill critical systems in place that a player might get rolled against them with no chance to avoid the result).

Besides my other stated problems with Universal systems, I find that most universal systems are either too limited, fill a specific style philosophy (which a good universal should not have), or have a scale problem when dealing with the very limited or the very complex.

Some of this comes from the concept of a "Universal Scale", which is often open ended. Whenever you use an open ended scale, you have a high probability of no real ability to interact between drastically differently scaled characters. Dragons aren't slain by lucky shots from archers, and cats that can't scratch or damage or person (or worse, cats that can instant kill a person with single bat of their paws) when this sort of scale problem occurs.

I don't have any cures for all these problems, that's why I prefer genre specific or modular designs in games. I don't believe any published commercial system I have encountered achieves methods to deal with these problems entirely, which is why I don't use them to run my own games.

Modular isn't perfect, its simply a safe "middle ground" for me. Whenever we hit a snag, problem or out-of-genre result, its time to design a new module to plug in or redesign one that is being used to fit the tropes involved. This means constant tinkering in each setting as needed, and developing new systems for each setting (the number of magic systems I've built in the past 2 years for separate settings would drive many non-design oriented GMs crazy along the way).

Comments on Interregnum #35:

If I fail to comment on your zine it does not mean it was unread or uninteresting, only that I had nothing really to add to what was said.

The Guest: The abuses of law enforcement could obviously be much worse, and have been in the past. We are not living in as enlightened a society as we like to pretend at times, nor necessarily the best one on the planet (though our leaders would like to make us believe otherwise). Many countries in Europe are far in advance of us (such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and in some cases even England), but of course there are many that are far worse in the world (such as Mexico, Russia, China, etc). One thing I am afraid of, with recent legal changes (such as the interpretation of the use of Habaeus

Corpus (spelling uncertain, my latin is terrible), the challenge to the Miranda Rights, the attempts to turn back the clock on Roe vs Wade, and the ridiculous changes to copyright law by the Bono Amendment and interpretation of Trademark Law in the current courts) that we are in a backwards spiral to try to return us to the Gilded Age when those who owned the Gold made all the rules and the common man/woman was powerless in the courts or in opposing the loss of civil liberties. The recent events in Seattle during the WTO convention, where martial law was basically put in place illegally by a mayor to avoid losing face and tourist trade because people dared to exercise their freedom of speech and assembly are a sure example of the erosion of civil rights that is taking place before our eyes without anyone in power coming to the aid of the individual that suffers at the hands of the authorities and their minions.

☺ Best of luck with clearing up your current collection of household and family concerns so that you can get back to enjoying roleplaying and writing for IR again.

☺ The transition of the net email rpg into an email hack-n-slash is a common event, and also happens in many of the cooperative games I've seen on the net of a more team oriented type (such as Diablo and Ultima). One of the reasons this occurs, I think, is that there is no sense of peer pressure and no feeling of loss on the parts of some players if the game falls apart. They feel they can always find another such game to turn into the combat monstrosity that they want, that the game is expendable. This happens less in face to face gaming these days, since there are less games and many will scrutinize new players (and GMs are more likely to share

with each other info about bad players that they encounter to prevent the ability to repeat such activity then they do on the net).

Words On The Wing: I've been thinking about your Highlander fiction, and I'd like to offer an observation or two. You have a tendency to center a lot on Methos (or his alter ID) and spend too much of your plots playing on the "Watcher Oath", "Hidden Immortal/Discovery By a Watcher" and related themes that are easily overworked and overdone on the character. Why not take the stories in a different direction? How about Methos having a story without a watcher or another immortal's presence being the focus point of the plot? This was one of the problems I had with Highlander and The Raven, they often became the "beheading of the week" and it became hard to believe that the main characters had a life outside their circle of immortal and watcher friends. If everyone had lives that involved with as many quickenings, there either had to be an infinite supply of immortals in the world or there should be only a handful of immortals left by now. In the first film it was presented as there was a very limited number of immortals, who bumped into each other every now and then.... the Kargen had not run into the Highlander in some 400 years when they came together in New York. Kastigale had not been around him for some 200 years (and Kastigale doesn't even appear in the retelling of the duel on Boston Common). The TV show added a lot more, but many times in the past the immortals had met without killing each other. If you are aiming at the final quickening being close at hand (the gathering) then it might be good to imply this more in the stories and give a sense of urgency to the characters and their actions. Being overly pragmatic and slow to "get involved" when the clock was ticking would seem unrealistic for a character portrayed to be as intelligent and experienced as Methos usually is. Another idea to try is to perhaps take the character into a new role - perhaps having him moved out of research temporarily (due to a staffing problem) and put into the field watching another immortal (or a pre-immortal, if the watchers can detect them), or looking into the death or disappearance of a watcher that leads to a real problem for him to deal with. Perhaps having Methos travel a bit more from his familiar modern haunts into places he was in his youth on "research" about his past for the chronicles, or having to go and retrieve some of his own long-hidden diaries before they are discovered by some mundane archaeologists? A little variety could go a long way in this sort of fan fiction.

True Magick: Your review of *Beyond the Mountains of Madness* was interesting, but didn't mention one element that I've heard about it that turned me away from it. I've been told by several people that it was designed as a fairly linear book, that the amount of variance within the designed storypath was fairly limited (including even choice of starting equipment for the characters), a feature I don't like in a campaign. I prefer onions or open ended modules and campaigns, where the players can take it far astray and find the detail level remains consistent no matter how far they may wander from the "planned path". This is a problem I've encountered several times with CoC products, and why I tend to be discriminating in regards to which ones I buy. Did you find this criticism to be true, or is it really more flexible (especially in regards to possible endings) than I've been told?

☺ Your sharing of your viewing of London is definitely appreciated, especially after having run a campaign a while ago set there that drew heavily from the myths and legends of its past (this was my Perilous Earth game, which ended some 3+ years ago after a run of a bit over a year realtime).

Sign of The Dancing Priestess: In reading thru your piece on breaking up, one point came thru in my mind of your descriptions of the GM that was running the GURPS fantasy campaign, the GM pulled a bad bait-and-switch on Cindy because he didn't really want magic in the game in the hands of the players. I find this sort of thing detestable on the part of a GM. Bait and Switch situations are bad enough, but to center on making one particular character useless (first sending her into a no-manna desert and then by stealing her magic item and not using it as a lead in to another plot but just as a means of taking it away) is just bad GMing. I've pulled a loose bait and switch on players before, but not one with such an obnoxious goal. [In general I oppose most bait and switch plots as they rarely are successful for everyone involved]. He just didn't want magic in his game, and was running a fantasy game in name only with the sort of limits he was putting on the situation thru his plot manipulations. If he had been honest from the start he could have avoided a lot of grief and wasted game time.

☺ In regards to the last break up with a player in our group, its important to note that I went thru a very prolonged effort of fixing things with the player and trying to give them a certain level of benefit of the doubt along the way. I went straight down Rich Staats' list of how to deal with a problem player in regards to communication and compromise, but as each step was tried the situation continued to deteriorate. The last step, developing a group contract, and thus trying to set up an in-group process of handling conflicts between players was the final straw for him. I think part of the problem is that I refused to turn the discussion into a vocal debate, because I knew of his pride in his debating skills (his having been highly ranked in debating contests in college) and instead making it into a written discussion where both he and cindy were on a level ground in the situation (as was nearly everyone else). He had a tendency to bully situations a bit, and was prone to wanting to always be the "center stage" character in the game, even breaking the rules blatantly in several other GM's games to suit himself (We saw a chunk of this in the short TFOS game. His reputation in Champions as a player was one that GMs should make sure to check his math thoroughly as he often got it wrong, with some implied miscalculation to his advantage on purpose; his reputation as a GM was to railroad players badly and to not really study the rules, setting or module that he was running ahead of time, which definitely proved true when we let him run a short scenario).

☺ Your analysis of the game you and Ben are running is a bit harsh in some places. I would agree that more work was needed in regards to details on Ben's part, or at least more attention by him of the details that you put in that he failed to miss. There were some problems with character conflict, but that's because some folks didn't take to heart the setup, that the character's were all connected to each other more closely from school and their mutual interests (in most cases) in the computer firm that they worked for. Ben tried to combine two elements together that either alone could have been the center of the

campaign, the Discovery of The Character's Secret Abilities (this being true of most of the character's except for Opal & Mirandee) and the plot of the Magical Conspiracy. Using the events of the Conspiracy to reveal the secret abilities was a viable way of doing it, but I think it could have been stretched out a bit more before being dragged into the magical realm of the underworld by events. The characters who were discovering their abilities, for the most part, didn't trust them at all and thus they saw little usage or importance in the game. Those that were more focused on combat oriented skills instead ended up controlling center stage 80% of the time. Since I was running the PC that was most outside of both these groups (Mirandee had known about her abilities and refined them for some time before events had started, but had hidden them from the majority of the group; and Mirandee was not one of the gun toting combat experts) she ended up not as a bridge, but as a point of conflict, despite the fact she should have really been the "Guide" to their magical mystery tour within themselves (and Calvin, Ben's Conspiracy experienced NPC and knowledge bearer about the underworld should have been the guide for that part of the setting when it was encountered). Part of the problem is that Ben overemphasized the combat agenda in the game, thus violence became the "solution of the day" in many cases. I think that the game succeeded despite these problems, and that your capability to think on your feet and GM in general was much better than you were originally willing to credit yourself with.

Preface To What Follows:

Since we were running a bit thin this month, thanks to the effects of the holidays on some of the IR regulars, and some personal family obligations that left others unable to provide their usual excellent viewpoints and material, I decided it was time that I put forth an even greater amount of material than usual.

The following piece is the first part of a work of fiction, inspired by one of the game worlds I've run for folks previously (Perilous Earth) and centering around one of the more popular NPCs.

Perilous Earth is a modern world caught in a magical cold war between the Heavenly Host of angels, the Infernal Host of demons, the elemental Genies and the Aristocratic Faeries, with humanity caught in the middle. Its not as dark a world as In Nomine can be, nor the White Wolf World of Darkness, but does indeed have its dark side.

The majority of humanity doesn't understand that there is a supernatural war going on behind the scenes.

The story is a work in progress, and I would appreciate constructive criticism on it, and on its ability to work without having a lot of detailed information about the game world. Its not a completed story - to some extent whether I finish it will depend on how it is received - I've had a case of writer's block in regards to it for most of the past year, and hope that by presenting it I will be nudged into continuing it, refining it, and finishing it.

A Turn of Some Friendly Cards

(A Tale from The Perilous Earth)
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Synchronicity Smith's flight arrived at Heathrow Airport with what would be declared the nastiest storm front of the year just moments behind it. The storm had been chasing the plane for all of its trip from Ireland, and had been chasing Synchronicity himself for a few hours before that.

As the plane landed safely and Smith made it safely into the terminal he sighed with relief. There was little that a vindictive storm could do now but rant and rail against the windows.

After passing thru the usual security checkpoints without a hitch, Synchronicity looked for a chair to flop into. It had been thirty hours since he had last slept safely, and he had no rest on the short flight home thanks to the storm. Still, his efforts had been worth it, the chance for peace on the emerald isle was now a lot better than it had been in decades.

Thunder cracked and he jumped instinctively back to his feet. He could look out to the tarmac from here, where the storm now drenched everything. That last bolt had hit one of the hangers on the far side of the field. For a moment he could make out a face in darkness, among the angry clouds. He smiled and waved before it faded from sight, taunting his enemy one last time, then turned away into the depths of the airport.

Synchronicity dug in his pocket and drew out a card from his deck, pausing before turning it over to glance upon the rearing Unicorn on the field of green and formalize his thoughts. He was unsure of where he should head next, and hoped the card would give him a needed clue.

The pasteboard turned to show a man standing behind a podium, upon which sat a heavy open book, and wearing a white robe. Behind him was huge circular stain-glass window, adored with a Celtic cross encircled by a vine of roses. The card bore the words 'The Priest' upon the bottom in the usual lettering style of the deck.

"Nigel?" Synchronicity spoke out loud, before again pocketing his cards into their waterproof container within his white suit coat. He belted his trench coat and headed towards the airport street exit, where a single cab stood waiting for a fare.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver with a thick cockney accent.

"Highgate Village, the Highgate Bed & Breakfast"

"Righto, Gov"

Synchronicity had not stopped in to see Nigel in nearly three years, not since that grizzly affair with the shrunken heads they'd been involved in. Its not that Nigel was a bad sort, but he wasn't the kind of person that he wanted to spend too much free time around. Still, the cards had pointed to him, and they were rarely wrong about such things.

The storm continued to drench the area near Heathrow, but once they were away from it, the rains and winds died down considerably and no lightning struck in their vicinity. This was certainly good news - the Jinn had lost the scent of his trail and would cease its tantrum shortly. Considering the nature of Nigel's life this was both a good and bad omen, it meant that Nigel would probably be needing his presence far more than he would need Nigel's sanctuary. Synchronicity decided to doze until they reached Nigel's place, in case he'd be facing another sleepless night.

Finally the cab pulled up in front of the 'Highgate B&B', a rustic looking three story building that sat among fine examples of the dire need for historic preservation in North London, tired looking homes from a previous few centuries. Across the street stood the old 'Prancing Stag Pub', which seemed the only other source of light on the street. Synchronicity paid his driver and exited into the drizzle.

He had to ring at the door three times before someone slid open the bolt to receive him. It was Cathy, Nigel's daughter, who let him into the sitting room. She showed no sign of recognizing him, but then again he had seen little of her when last he was here. Still she had blossomed nicely from a rather thin fifteen year old into a college freshman that was sure to break some hearts.

"Is Nigel in? I'm just back in town and haven't looked him up recently."

"Dad's a bit busy right now, sir."

"He's always busy. Well, I'm too tired to bother him tonight anyway. Set me up with one of the vacant rooms, and I'll see him at breakfast."

Cathy took out the registry book and had Synchronicity sign in, and took his money for the room and the next day's meal before she looked at the entry in the book. Her mouth dropped upon seeing his signature. "Uncle Synchronicity? But dad's been trying to get ahold of you for weeks! I didn't realize -"

"Please, I need to get some sleep. Unless it's a matter of life and death that can't wait until morning, don't tell Nigel I'm here, ok Cathy?"

"Sure... I'm sorry I didn't recognize you, its been a long time."

She handed him the key to the first room at the top of the stairs and Synchronicity showed himself the way. He could be pretty sure that Nigel was probably in the library curled up with some new acquisition from Alexandria or researching a new lead on the secret treasure of the Knights Templar. Cathy had been too calm for it to be really important.

Sleep claimed him as soon as he had flopped into the bed. The kind of sleep that allows one to ignore a minor war or other such unimportant interruptions until its natural conclusion. It was not the sort of sleep that inspired dreams.

* * * * *

It was late morning, nearer to noon than dawn, when Synchronicity at last returned to consciousness, pried himself from the mattress and stepped into a warm shower. When at last he left the confines of the shower and toweled off, he was feeling refreshed and slightly ravenous.

His suit was in need of a lot more care than he could provide, its white linen looking drab and dirty in numerous places and at least one button was missing from the jacket. He dug out his cards and other important items from its pockets and piled it on a chair in the room. Just then he heard footsteps in the hall, and decided to take a chance, opening the door to see Cathy carrying a tray approaching.

"Perfect timing."

"I heard you in the shower and - oops" Cathy blushed, and then Synchronicity remembered that he was attired in a bath towel and nothing else.

"Sorry, my suits beat, and the airport lost my luggage."

Cathy smiled and carried in the tray, recovering her composure quickly. She then snatched up the pile of clothes from the chair.

"I'll send these out to be cleaned, and see if I can find something for you from Dad's closet, though I won't promise it will fit well."

Rather than argue, Synchronicity attacked the tray with relish, finding an appetizing array of sausages, eggs, bacon, scones, and kippers. Cathy made some small talk that failed to register much of a response from him and departed with the clothes.

There was definitely something in the air, Synchronicity could feel it, that left him feeling a bit edgy. He suspected that it might be a residue from whatever effects Nigel might have been using the night before. A quick check out the window showed a beautiful clear sky outside, so it was not the presence of the malevolent storm that had trailed him to the city earlier.

A few minutes after he finished, Cathy returned with a pair of cotton trousers, a shirt, and some underclothes. They were hardly a perfect fit, Nigel had definitely been putting one some weight recently, but he could manage to make them do until he could make a hop off to the shops.

"Dad went out an hour or so ago, said he'd be back for dinner. We have no tourists scheduled tonight, so unless someone walks in it'll be just us three for dinner."

"Do you have a car? I should really pick up some clothes, so I don't inconvenience Nigel's wardrobe too long."

"I can drive you in - I've got to drop your suit off at the dry cleaners and pick up a few items for the kitchen."

"Lead on then."

The shopping trip went smoothly, and they were soon heading back to the B&B. They chatted a bit on the road, and Cathy had filled him in on some minor local goings on and the general mood that Nigel had been in lately. Seemed Nigel was definitely involved in something, as he'd been leaving most of the operation of the family business in her hands for the past month and taken several mysterious day trips into the city. Business had been slow most of the summer, so it hadn't been too much of a burden upon her, but her father's absences, long nights and sporadic strangeness had been getting on her nerves.

Cathy had a touch of the power, but had no idea what was going on, so Synchronicity wasn't about to let too much information out that might overwhelm her. He speculated aloud that Nigel was probably hot on the trail of some antiques for his collection, and she more or less seemed to accept that enough to drop the subject.

Nigel's land rover was parked next to the B&B when they got back, which meant he had gotten back far earlier than expected. They took their purchases inside, Synchronicity changed clothes in his room, and then went looking for him in the third floor library.

The Library was a minor disaster, with books piled up on the table, chairs and floor in a haphazard mess. Nigel was on a climbing ladder, fetching down a wooden box from the top shelf of one bookcase as Synchronicity entered.

"Synch! Could you give me a hand with this?" he asked from his precarious perch.

Synchronicity, now attired in casual pants and a polo shirt, took the dusty box from him so he could climb back down. The box must have been on the shelf for several years, from the accumulated dust upon it. It was intricately carved with lead patterns and had on the top a Celtic cross entwined with roses.

"What's all this about Nigel?"

"Where's Cathy?"

"In the Kitchen, I presume, putting away groceries."

"Good, lets talk," he said, taking back the box and setting it down on the table between two piles of books. "We have a nasty problem that I'd love you to lend a hand with."

"The last time you had a problem I had to help you fight off a very angry Loa that you had offended with your treasure hunting."

"This times different, old friend. Someone's gotten ahold of some very nasty books and are causing some problems in the area. I'm afraid they plan on doing something stupid that could put the whole village in serious trouble."

"Why me? You should be able to handle one miscreant with some books. Isn't that what you're trained to do? "To Know, To Dare, and To Meddle" and all that?"

"Its more complex than that. She's made some sort of pact with the demons, so she's not just a miscreant."

"You still haven't explained why I should be involved?"

"Because you're a freelance troubleshooter, of sorts, for the magic world. My magic can be countered by a full blown demon, but not yours."

"And -?

"And I presume you care about keeping Highgate here in the mortal plane and not in Hell itself."

"Trans-locate an entire suburb to Hell?"

"That appears to be the goal she's working towards."

"Ambitious. But the amount of power involved -"

"Puts her way beyond my talents, or that of any individual Rosicrucian."

"And you think I'm in that league?"

"Alone, no. But with some help, possibly."

"Sorry, I don't have an army in my pocket right now...."

"If you couldn't help, you wouldn't be here, and you know it."

Nigel had a sharp tongue when he wanted, and could cut to the chase faster than most people that Synchronicity had encountered in his life. He knew the nature of Synchronicity better than most, and had just pinpointed the inevitable fact. For Synchronicity there was no backing out of a situation the cards had brought him into.

"I'll need some more detail, like how long do you think we have before she tries, and when she'll be most vulnerable."

"I know. I've been working on that, and a few other things. I suspect she has some help, or else she could never have made contact in the first place. I know where she lives, and I have my fetch staked out watching who comes and goes."

"Is that a good idea? If she spots your fetch, she could figure out you're onto her."

"Necessary risk. I can't maintain around the clock surveillance thru mundane means, and we need to know everything we can with this sort of situation."

"How did you find out about her in the first place?"

"Luck, I was at the book auction that she got her starting tools at. Unfortunately I was tapped out before they came up or I would have snatched them up and locked them away myself."

"And you're sure she knows how to use them?"

"I checked with my few remaining contacts, she's known to the crowd down at *Plato's Retreat* and is on the 'unwelcome guests' list down there."

Synchronicity was familiar with *Plato's Retreat*, a small pub just outside of Highgate in the city where philosophers, metaphysicians and a select few practitioners of the magical arts hang out and had been doing so since the turn of the century. He'd been there once or twice, but the owner rubbed him the wrong way. To get on their unwelcome guests list was no small feat, only social buffoons and the most dangerous of mages were on it. Synchronicity had managed to keep himself off of it by not visiting too often, buying a few rounds for the house, and never getting into philosophy discussions.

Nigel opened up the box and began to extract paraphernalia from its padded confines. Several of the items were obvious tools for Rosicrucian Magics, marked with a Rosy Cross and other symbols that they used. Beside these there were a number of sealed glass vials, containing

clear liquids, and one containing a thick cloudy goop that Synchronicity did not recognize at all. A flare pistol, the kind used on board ships to signal distress, and a number of flares for it also came from the box.

"Are you suggesting that we confront the lady involved directly? I don't think that a frontal assault is exactly the best approach, Nigel."

"No, not an assault, not right now. I'm just making sure things are ready if it comes that, old friend."

"Good, for as I said, we are not capable of doing such between the two of us with any level of success if she has as much power as you think she does."

"I do want your word though, old friend, that if things get hot, you'll get Cathy out of the line of fire. She's all that I have left in the world of her mother, and I swore on her grave that she wouldn't suffer from my involvement in the college."

"She's as innocent as she looks then?"

"Still. She knows nothing of her heritage, and hasn't been approached by the recruiters. I don't want her to follow in my footsteps or those of her dear mother."

"If this comes to a head, there will be no hiding the events from her. Watching the neighborhood you lived in all your life get dragged into hell is likely to awaken any innocent to the truth."

"Better that then her getting dragged down with it."

"Have you considered contacting the Magda Club?"

"The Snobs? They are not men of action, they'd just ignore things until afterwards and try to hide things from the public. They serve no useful purpose."

"That's not always true, from my experience. If they cared, they would have been involved by now. They are not ignorant of the events, but not always willing or able to act."

A moment passed in silence as Nigel shut the box. Synchronicity, unfortunately, knew that he was probably right this time about the club's members, though it was disturbing that they knew and weren't acting.

"I've alerted the Order, and they've decided it best not to risk additional personnel. Our numbers are too few in the Order these days."

And they think you're expendable, said Synchronicity to himself alone. The Rosicrucians had been losing ground for over a century, and had never been as numerous as they pretended they had been in the past. Nigel had been expected by them to be one of their great shining stars, instead he was a minor player running what they used for an occasional safehouse and waystation. The death of his wife had changed his attitude and made him cling more firmly to what little he had of his own in the world, instead of risking life and limb for a fading cause.

"So you want me to find you some additional help to deal with all this."

"Once we get a grip on what's going on. First I'll call back my fetch and see what we're facing, then we can figure out what we need to do and you can help put together a team to help."

Nigel made sure that the library door was bolted and motioned Synchronicity to take a seat on the far side of the library, out of the way of his magics. He's set up his tools and cleared away the books from the tabletop, and laid out a cloth embroidered with a circle of symbols. He went thru a complex sequence of movements, accompanied by a chanting in a nearly forgotten dialect of French.

Slowly a glow, like a firefly, appeared above the center of the circle of symbols. It hovered there, the size of the head of a pin, then began to grow. As it grew a form took shape, being drawn back thru the space corridor to the library from its distant location. When the light ended it sat upon the circle on the cloth, a friendly looking German Shepherd puppy.

"Very Well, what do you have for me?" said Nigel to the puppy. It was then he realized something was wrong, a concerned look crossed his face. "Where did you get that collar?"

Suddenly the puppy transformed into a full sized dog, with glowing red eyes that struck fear into Nigel. A female voice issued from it, addressing him, that was both steeped in sexuality and menace.

"I know you now, meddler. You are a petty little man, barely worth my notice. Swear by your faith to bother me no more and I will be merciful."

"Never, not to the likes of you!"

Instead of a reply the dog dived at Nigel, jaws open exposing a mouth full of more teeth than any normal hound could possess. Nigel stumbled back against its weight, and its teeth sunk into his left shoulder painfully.

Synchronicity moved fluidly to his feet, grabbed at his deck, and randomly drew a card, focusing his power into its image. The card bore the picture of a woman dressed in archaic clothing, hands over her head and an arch of flame between them. It bore one word upon it, *Farouche*. He turned the card to face the embattled Rosicrucian and the hellhound.

Reality was suddenly turned on its side and spun in a dizzying way. Nigel and the Hound were knocked to the floor, the hound losing its grip upon him in the process. A bookcase crashed down upon the beast a moment later, with a resounding crunch of bones. A moment later, the world righted itself.

The room was a disaster. The bookshelves lay at odd angles, their contents spewed out on the already cluttered floor into a complete mess. The table had overturned, and all its contents joined the books on the floor. Synchronicity staggered to his own feet, for he had been knocked down as badly as all the rest. He moved quickly to Nigel, helping him to his feet. Blood soaked his clothes where they had been torn thru, but luckily nothing had crashed down upon him like it had the hound.

He righted a chair and sat Nigel into it. He moved cautiously to the bookcase and leveraged it, but the heavy oak was more than he alone could lift. The puddle of black ichor forming on the floor around it spoke volumes, the hellhound had been crushed to death.

"Thanks, I think."

"Where's the first aid kit?" Synchronicity said, putting his deck back safely in his pocket.

"In the Kitchen"

Synchronicity unbolted the door and headed down the staircase. Cathy was waiting at the bottom looking worried.

"First Aid Kit," he said before she could say a word.

Cathy moved to the kitchen and retrieved it, and pressed it into his hands. Her face was concerned, but her hands were steady.

"What -?"

"Wait here. I'll explain afterwards. Nigel's banged up a bit."

Synchronicity headed up the stairs, two at a time, leaving Cathy no time to press him for information. The card had worked, but the effect had been extreme. If the door hadn't been bolted, making the room a contained locale, it could have been the whole building instead. Explaining this in some way that would appear normal would not be easy, to say the least.

* * * * *

"So what tore up the library?" asked Cathy, as she and Synchronicity shared a much welcomed cup of tea in the kitchen a half-hour later. Nigel was resting in his bedroom, luckily his wounds hadn't needed stitching, or he'd have to be lying to the staff at the hospital emergency room.

"It's a bit hard to explain, but I'm afraid that a chunk of the damage was done by me."

"You? But Why?"

"Under one of the bookcases is the remains of a very nasty dog that was trying to take a piece out of Nigel's shoulder. A German Shepherd, trained as an attack dog. I'm afraid that we over reacted a bit, but its not every day that one deals with such things."

"But How did an attack dog -?"

"Robbery, perhaps. Your dad's got some very valuable antiques, and he drew some attention at that auction he attended a few weeks ago. That someone thought it was worth it to take what he has by force would be a reasonable conclusion."

"Are you going to call the police?"

"Not much they could do, the dog has no identification, and I doubt someone smart enough to use such a beast would leave any evidence of their own passing. Besides, police tend to make us a bit nervous."

"I've noticed that, are you and dad mixed up in something illegal?"

"No, just that we've both had some bad experiences. Remember what happened with your mother when we went to the police."

A visible shiver went thru Cathy's body on this mention. She didn't know the details, but did know that her mother had been kidnaped and the police had failed to find the man responsible before he killed her. That Synchronicity had helped her dad track the man down, and that it was he who had brought the madman to his end. The police had merely mopped up behind him.

"So now what?"

"I'll get rid of the beast's body, and need your help cleaning up the mess. Tomorrow, when Nigel's feeling better, we'll see if they managed to get anything while we were dealing with the attack dog."

Cathy seemed calmed by the fact that there was a plan of action, and Synchronicity hoped to keep her occupied while he went about dealing with the situation before it got worse. Anyone who could take a minor fetch and transform it into a hellhound was not an amateur and not likely to be without other resources. She might not know about Synchronicity's presence, and he had to get things organized before she did.

<p align="center">* * * * *</p>

Dinnertime found Synchronicity occupying a booth at *Plato's Retreat*, waiting for the arrival of a much needed meal. His feet were a bit tired from the traveling he'd done earlier, but he didn't want Cathy driving him around to meet the folks he'd called on, or leaving Nigel alone for too long. He'd also made a good dozen phone calls along the way, to various acquaintances, and was just slightly better informed about the situation then he had been yesterday. He'd also retrieved his suit from the cleaners, and was relieved that all the stains had come out. His cash supply was a bit on the low side, a new suit was definitely beyond its reach for the present.

Several of the folks he had hoped to contact were not to be found, or were outside of the London area right now. Two had declined getting involved, and the rest would meet him here tonight. He'd let Cathy know that he was dining here tonight by phone, and she'd reported that things had remained quiet at the B&B, with no customers checking in so far and no further problems of note. Nigel was awake and being his usual self for the most part.

Dinner, when it arrived, made up for its simple nature by being copious in quantity. Evidently the clientele were used to eating only once a day (or less frequently) and wanted to imitate boa constrictors when they did eat, gorging themselves. What Synchronicity had thought would be a simple plate of food from the menu was instead a platter, including an entire roasted chicken, vegetables, stuffing, gravy, and half a loaf of bread. This was accompanied by a side salad of grazing proportions for several rabbits and a cup of onion soup. A pot of tea, with all the fixings, was also placed upon the table, to help him was it all down.

The evening crowd was starting to filter into the place, and made sure to avoid sitting anywhere near his table. These were the locals, and they wouldn't necessarily remember him from visits past or care to have much to do with him. This suited Synchronicity fine, he preferred that his meal was uninterrupted and his guests left equally alone with him this evening.

He had managed to polish off the soup and salad and was just starting to carve the fowl when the pub dropped into complete silence. He looked up to see the first of his expected guests walking across the room, turning a lot of heads. Leave it to Terrwyn to fail the basic concepts of subtlety and show up in her trademark fuchsia leather motorcycle outfit that fit like a glove to every curve. She spotted him and made a beeline for the booth, oblivious to the fact that a dozen or so people were watching her every step.

"Synchronicity, its good to see you again."

"Glad you could make it."

Terrwyn had not been his first choice, but Nicole wasn't answering her phone, and he needed a surprise that their adversary wouldn't be ready for. Synchronicity had learned a long time ago that keeping the surprises flowing was the best way to keep an opponent off balance. Terrwyn could provide just that sort of surprise, though a different one than Nicole would have.

"So where is everyone else?"

"Give them a little time, you're actually a few minutes early yourself."

Terrwyn hailed the waitress and had another cup for tea brought over to the table. The Pub slowly returned to a normal level of activity and sound around them as they made small talk. Terrwyn had just finished up doing stunts for a commercial and was thus once again between jobs. The BBC hadn't had anything for her in a month, and there were no movie companies looking for a stunt woman in the London area right now.

Synchronicity had just about had his fill of the platter, and Terrwyn was on her second cup of tea, when the table was approached by the second expected guest for the evening. Kay MacIver had made far less an impression on the locales than Terrwyn had, he looked more like a solicitor or financier than the sort of person one would contact to deal with demonic magics. Time had been kind to him, and he approached middle age with a dignified physique, marred only by a slight limp compensated for with a rosewood walking stick. His dark blue suit was immaculately pressed, and he carried a matching bowler hat beneath his arm.

"Punctual, as always Kay. Please do have a seat."

Introductions were made, though only first names were used. The waitress was hailed again and the remains of the meal taken away, then more tea and cups brought. Kay complained about the weather, London traffic and the problems he had had finding parking near the pub. Terrwyn became a bit bored with the Scotsman's conversation, and was staring off towards the dart game when the third and final guest arrived in the pub. She turned back from the game and realized she had evidently missed the woman's arrival entirely, as she was already seated next to her.

Synchronicity introduced Kay and Terrwyn to Calandra, whose accent revealed to be of American origin. Calandra's mode of dress was neither as eye catching as Terrwyn's, nor as proper as Kay's. It was her face, and more specifically her eyes, that caught one's attention, as they seemed to change color depending on how the light struck them, sometimes blue and sometimes gray and occasionally an odd hue of violet that seem unnatural.

"Now that we are all together, let us get to the matter at hand, my friends. An old acquaintance of mine has uncovered information that shows an occult threat to the village of Highgate. This has led to an attack on him to silence him that has failed. I need you to help me help him deal with this situation before all of Highgate is translocated into the realm of the demons themselves."

"What details do you have old chap?" asked Kay.

"Blythe Ashley appears to be the catalyst of this plan, and is a rather dangerous woman with sufficient knowledge and resources to carry it out. She acquired some manuscripts at an auction that enhanced her knowledge of the dark realm, and has been making agreements and plans with demonic forces. She is sufficiently powerful that she was able to use a hellhound against Nigel, and probably will become more powerful if she can succeed in this endeavor. We know where she lives, but so far surveillance has gotten us nothing but exposure to attacks from her."

"So we don't know when she will act, how she will act or what she has for allies?" asked Kay.

"Not yet, but we could with some help. Each of you has skills and talents that can help us move in the right direction and acquire what we need. Its not going to be easy, and I'm sorry to say that except for Nigel we are the only ones that are trying to do anything in the situation. We have a slight advantage, only Nigel is known to her at present."

"So we have some element of surprise. What are our resources? I'm afraid that I don't know either of these ladies, nor Nigel, and although I have some personal experience in your own talents, I'd like to be sure I know what I can expect of my allies."

"Well Kay," said Synchronicity as he finished off another cup of tea, "let us place our cards upon the table. Terrwyn is a professional stunt woman, and a natural born telekinetic of some capability. Calandra is an adept in the field of Quantum Magic, and has a touch of Faery heritage, being what is commonly called a changeling. My own magics are, as you know, a combination of Faery Green and Worldly Gray. Your skills in the design and application of the tools of espionage, and the little Gray and Crimson magics that you dabble in on the side, should also prove an asset in dealing with our surveillance problems. Nigel, who'll you meet afterwards, is a competent Rosicrucian, using their mixture of white and gray magics."

Kay looked over his companions with a wary eye. Synchronicity he knew could be relied on, and had been on a number of occasions, back when Kay worked as a government employee. He had a bit of a wild spirit to him, but was never one to let his mates down in the crunch or fail to watch his back properly. He was also an excellent judge of character.

Kay could tell my the look of Calandra that she relied too much upon magic, and might lack enough common sense in the field. Still, to have survived this long she had to be reasonably good at that magic, and such could be an asset when dealing with the likes of Blythe Ashley.

Finally there was Terrwyn, a person who made her living taking risks, surviving rough and tumble activities (and thus unlikely to be the type to complain when things got rough) but also someone who didn't live quite in the real world, and was likely to know nothing about the real dangers that might occur. With this group, she'd end up having to be the heavy in dealing with physical threats, and that might not be a job she was up to. Still it was a challenge, and the team was not impossible to whip into shape, in Kay's opinion.

"Alright, lets get this show on the road, I'm in." Said Kay, with an air of authority, as if everyone had been waiting for his opinion.

"Agreed," said Calandra, with a twinkle in her eye.

"You knew I was in when I showed up," said Terrwyn as she looked Synchronicity in the eyes directly.

"Presumably our first step is to gather information," said Synchronicity, as he reached into his pocket for a small notepad. "Blythe Ashley owns a small townhouse on the edge of Highgate, 72 Oak Street, and a bookstore on Portabello Road, known as the *'Outré livre de chevets'*, which is French for 'Bizarre Bedside Books', "he said, reading from his notes.

"Surveillance would be our best bet," said Kay.

"Not that easy, but if you have some way you'd like to try mechanically then that might be best. Nigel already lost his familiar to this woman, so presumption is she will be on guard."

"Point taken. Could be she has some wards against magical gee-gaws."

"Calandra, I want you to check into Nigel's B&B as a guest, keep an eye on him and Cathy. She may have homed in on him, and that means that they could be getting a second round from her bag of tricks when she find out he's not dead. Keep a low profile in the magic department, Cathy is supposed to be kept in the dark unless there's no choice."

"If you insist, though I can't see why you want to hide the truth from her." replied Calandra.

"Nigel does, its his home and his call. A matter of honor."

"You say that with such a straight face, Synchronicity."
"I never lie, Calandra."

"But you will do just about everything else for the right cause, eh? I have not forgotten What you did to the Dutchman."

"Sometimes the ends does justify the means - and keeping everyone alive was the best choice. I use violence when there is no other choice. An illusion or two is par for the course."

Synchronicity turned to Terrwyn, "We need to spit the rest of us between the two addresses. I need Kay to hit the bookstore with his gear, he isn't known and can get in and out thru the front door as a customer. I need you to give me a hand with her house."

"Cat burglar time?" She asked, a smile on her lips that echoed the thrill that was speeding her heart up.

"Yes, time to play Amanda's game," he said, knowing that this phrasing would thrill her. Amanda was a character from a television series, a cat burglar, that Terrwyn had done the stunts for a number of times in the past, in Paris. Terrwyn had found that particular part, and the cast of that show, a joy to work with over the years. Unfortunately they didn't need a stuntwoman for more than a few weeks of the year for the shots involved. She had made sure to get a complete set of the props and gear that they had used at her own expense, and practiced with it on occasion in private. Now she could use it in a real-life operation, and this excited her thoroughly.

"Well, my car's outside. We should adjourn there and I'll give you what's needed." said Kay, ever ready to get things moving along and end the personal chit-chat between Synchronicity and the ladies. It was his way of agreeing with the plan, without saying so directly.

The bill was paid, and a healthy tip left for the staff, but not so much that it would draw undue attention. The four of them exited to the street, and were soon standing next to Kay's Rolls Royce, about four city blocks distance from the pub, pulled off from the road and in a copse of tired looking trees. Kay was never one to leave his transportation exposed to view unless necessary, the best exits, he once told Synchronicity, are the one's no one realizes exist.

He opened the storage compartment and pressed a concealed button. The apparent bottom, spare tire and all, raised up on a silent hydraulic system to expose the rather large secret compartment beneath it, where he had a stock collection of tools of his trade that would have impressed many people in law enforcement. He ignored the weapons, detonators and other destructive devices, and instead took out what appeared to be a matched set of cell phone devices, and handed one to each of them.

"Bounces off an old weather system communications satellite, but don't use them for more than ten minutes at a time or the government may think they have a problem with the unit and take it offline for analysis. Good for anyplace between here and Berlin, and as far south as The Rock. There's six in all, but the last two won't be useful. Each of the auto-dial numbers are pre-programmed in, to make them near foolproof for talking with each other."

Next from the cache came out a pair of small static protective bags, containing six button shaped items each. He gave one of these to Synchronicity and pocketed the other himself in his jacket pocket.

"There's an adhesive peel strip on the back, pull it off and it activates the microphone. The battery is good for about 48 hours, and it picks up in about a ten foot radius. Make sure not to place them too close to a radio or television, as they give off a bit of interference."

"Understood. How far can the receiver be?"

A black box about the size of a paperback book came out of the cache and was handed to Synchronicity. "That's a signal transmitter, put it outside the building, within about ten feet, and it will pick up the microphones, boost the signal and send it out to us up to ten miles away. Don't put it near any power transformers or it'll get scrambled."

Next came out what looked like an answering machine, which he handed to Calandra. "That's a base receiver and recorder for Nigel's place, I've got a spare in the car. This way we can eavesdrop in private. The dial there will let you choose which microphone to listen to. It records each of the mikes on a separate track as they feed in. You do have to plug it in, of course. The tapes good for about 6 hours of constant information. Here's a few spare tapes, in case you need them, and a headset for privacy."

"I'll contact a friend of mine at the ministry, and see if I can get them to monitor the phones for us, but no promises on that front. " Kay concluded as he closed up his equipment case, after placing a small pistol into the inner pocket of his jacket.

"Do you really think that'll be of any use?" asked Calandra, motioning to where the gun had been hidden away.

"Might. I doubt she's bullet proof, and the bullets are silver cased and were blessed at the Vatican. I try to be prepared, in case something goes wrong or this turns out to be a trap we're walking into."

Kay closed the trunk with a resounding thud. Synchronicity secretly wished that he hadn't mentioned the possibility of a trap, now they'd all be a bit more paranoid, and that could be a disadvantage at this stage.

Final goodbyes were made, and Calandra made her way off to Nigels, while Kay drove away to the bookstore. Terrwyn led Synchronicity back to where she had parked her motorcycle. Luckily she'd remembered to tote a spare helmet along. From here they'd make their way back to her flat, to pick up her burglar gear, and then would make their way to the house in the cover of darkness.

Synchronicity, as he got ready to ride, drew out his deck and cut to a card, hoping for a good omen. Instead he found a very strange card waiting for him in the circumstance, The Star Crossed Lovers. He tucked them away, puzzled by the result and what it might mean. At least it wasn't something obviously bad, like the Death card.

He wrapped his arms around Terrwyn's waist firmly, and grew slightly pale as she decided to show off by launching them down the street with only the back wheel touching the road. At least he knew that Kay's paranoia hadn't touched Terrwyn's spirit for fun and adventure.

*   *   *   *   *

Kay approached the *"Outré livre de chevets"* with a slight apprehension. The one window to the shop held only a few clues as to the contents one would find inside, probably to keep the locals from screams of outrage. Bright silks decorated it, upon tiers that contained a number of recent volumes that held great amounts of sexual suggestion upon their dust covers, but nothing as obvious as one might find in some of the cheaper adult bookstores that huddled together a in some parts of London. Several bore their titles in French, disguising their nature with that foreign culture that had stood in England's shadow for so many years, and thus adding to the atmosphere of legitimacy that the marketer had intended on the window layout.

Kay checked his watch, and saw that it was nearly eight in the evening. Still the store was lit up for business, and according to the sign, was open only from the hours of four in the afternoon until midnight. Odd hours for a retail establishment, in the ordinary sense, but understandable for one that dealt with a clientele that was probably uninterested in it wares earlier in the day.

A small bell tinkled above his head as he opened the door and stepped into the shops interior. Here too it was decorated in brightly colored silks, a fine polished hardwood floor and a ceiling almost two floors above that was the color of the night sky and decorated with artistic representations of the zodiac. The shelving looked new, and well kept, and the register was nowhere to be seen, only a fine desk of quality mahogany. There was a scent of jasmine incense in the air, and a number of fine Indian, Tibetan and Oriental sculptures and nicknacks were tastefully arranged throughout the shelves. From somewhere played a strange music that sounded like that of crystalline wind chimes on a summer breeze. The atmosphere was enticing, relaxing and obviously intended to put the visitor into a mood for titillation and pleasure.

To Be Continued

The Chrome Libram

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Mechanics: Genre or Generic

When it comes to mechanics, I'll cut straight to the chase: I like mine tailored to the setting or genre of the game. Now, that isn't to say there are games in some genres that have really lousy rule systems--Traveller 4 comes to mind rather easily as do 2nd edition Shadowrun and The Babylon Project. Here are the games in my collection (off the top of my head) that I feel are inextricably tied to their systems:

o **Star Wars:** The D6 system is probably the only system I'd ever use with Star Wars. It has the right "feel" to it. Not only that, it's simple to learn and you only need six-siders to play it. In addition to the worldwide recognition of the movies and merchandise, this game's system makes it perfect for beginning roleplayers. I must admit that I am currently in mourning for the future of Star Wars roleplaying now that Wizards of the Coast has the license. The game will never be the same. To be honest, I will definitely not be investing in the Wizards version and will be sticking to the D6 system for Star Wars.

o **Cyberpunk 2020:** Another game I wouldn't change the system on. Combat in the game is rather lethal and cinematic (provided you roll right) and the system itself is rather simple as long as you don't go too in-depth with things like suppression fire and other combat nitpicks.

o **Star Trek, Star Trek TNG and Star Trek DS9:** Last Unicorn Games has hit the nail on the head as far as I'm concerned with their Icon system. Like Star Wars and the D6 system, the Icon system has the right "feel" for Star Trek. In addition, it's rather simple to learn and relies strictly on six-siders. Another perfect game for anyone getting into roleplaying in my opinion.

o **Pendragon:** This variant on the Basic Role-Playing system is the most fitting for the Arthurian millieu. Epic in flavor and simple to learn, it's another one I would use to teach roleplaying to beginners.

o **Call of Cthulhu:** Another variation of the Basic Role-Playing system, CoC's rules work excellent for the modern-day setting of the game as well as its other eras of play.

o **Toon:** To make Toon complicated in any way would be a crime against humanity! 'Nuff said.

When it comes to generic rules, I straddle the fencepost. I don't mind one system with several variants for different genres or sub-genres. What I'm opposed to are generic rules that try to force one set of rules on all genres. While I do own a number of GURPS books and play in a GURPS Traveller campaign (using GURPS Lite), I am reluctant to endorse the system by buying a copy of the core rules. GURPS to me has always been over-complicated. At the same time, I have heard complaints that some genres don't work well with the game as it stands (GURPS Supers being one of the prime focuses of complaint). As a result, either the rules or the genre require significant tailoring to fit each other. In the end, some of the flavor or feel of the genre or rules are lost. A key example of bad generic rules is TSR's failed Amazing Engine system. AE not only tried to force several different genres--including Victorian fantasy and science fiction--into one set of rules, it had lousy rules to begin with!

Looking at the generic rules out there, I would have to say that the ones that have my vote of confidence are D6 and FUDGE. The rulebooks for both are more like building-block sets than anything else. At the same time, D6, Alternity, Interlock (R. Talsorian's original roleplaying system) and Chaosium's Basic Role-Playing are all sets of rules which can be or are tailored for different genres. As noted above in my list, Call of Cthulhu and Pendragon use variations on the same system. Mekton Zeta, Cybergeneration and CP2020 all use variants on Interlock. The D6 system is tailored for a variety of genres ranging from fantasy (Hercules & Xena) to science fiction and superheroes (DC Universe, MIB and Star Wars).

Although I do own Alternity and the Star*Drive setting, the game itself is undergoing changes at a relatively good pace. There are noticeable differences between the Star*Drive and DarkoMatter settings from what I have seen of DarkoMatter. I would comment further, but I have not read the Alternity rules in enough depth to be truly familiar with the system.

Overall, I do prefer rule systems tailored to a specific genre. There is something about it that makes certain games "special" to me, that gives them an honored (or even dishonored) place in my gaming library. By tailoring a specific rule system or creating an independent rule system for a game in a certain genre, it makes the game stand out from the rest on its own merits or flaws. The resulting variety, in my opinion, is part of what makes our hobby so great.

REVIEWS

PRODUCT: Usagi Yojimbo Roleplaying Game
PUBLISHER: Gold Rush Games
EDITOR(S): Mark Arsenault, Paul Arden Lidberg
DESIGN: Greg Stolze
ARTIST(S): Stan Sakai
PRICE: $16.00 b 96, softcover

When I first heard that Gold Rush Games was coming out with an Usagi Yojimbo RPG, I was ecstatic. Usagi has become one of my favorite comics characters since I picked up Stan Sakai's (ongoing) run with Dark Horse Comics. That enthusiasm nearly faded when I heard the game was going to be "Fuzion powered." Fortunately, my fears were unjustified.

To be honest, Gold Rush Games has a diamond here--but it's a diamond in the rough. Jam packed with a stripped down and elegant version of the Fuzion rules and a complete Usagi Yojimbo timeline, the book is worth its $16 price tag for fans of the comic and gamers familiar with feudal Japan. For new gamers or those unfamiliar with Usagi Yojimbo or feudal Japan, the game needs some work. The mechanics of the game, dubbed "Instant Fuzion" are fairly simple and the traits of both Interlock and Hero stand out clearly. Character generation is point-based and characters may receive skill bonuses and special abilities based on their species and profession. For skill tests, the player rolls 3d6+[skill]+[trait] against a difficulty number or against an opposing roll.

Combat is also very elegant; players are given four options or strategies--total attack, cautious attack, total defense or run away. The game also includes mechanics for using conventional playing cards in combat. (Each suit represents a particular strategy.) Damage is fairly straightforward, using a hit point system to track killing and stun damage. Some weapons, such as the bo, tonfa and nunchaku do only stun damage, reducing the number stun hits a character can take before falling unconscious. Bladed and spiked weapons, such as the katana or tetsubo, do killing damage. Armor is available, giving 12 points of protection, but also has its drawbacks.

Unfortunately, things get a little unclear in other areas. One of the stats on the character sheet (RES--resourcefulness?) depends on the Mental trait, but there are no rules for its use. According to one of Gold Rush's reps on rec.games.frp.misc, some things were changed at the last minute in some areas and so not all of the corrections got in--a fault which can doom a game to a premature death.

There are also a few typos and editing errors in the book, but the most glaring error is the omission of an equipment price table and monetary system. Whether these were left out by accident or design is unknown, but the omission is clearly noticeable. The game also boasts a full chapter on the major personas in the title character's life and gives both NPC and PC stats for them. In addition, the book is long on the history of Usagi Yojimbo, but too short when it comes to culture and society in Japan. The only real links to culture and society appearing in the book are an index of all the characters who have appeared in Usagi Yojimbo and a glossary of Japanese terms and phrases which have appeared over the years in the series. Players and gamemasters who want the facts on Tokugawa-era Japan should either head for the nearest library or invest in Bushido, Legend of the Five Rings, or Gold Rush's Sengoku RPG.

To reiterate, this game is a diamond in the rough. While Gold Rush Games put a lot of hard work into it, the company should have put a little more effort into cleaning up the rules and editing errors. If you're familiar with feudal Japan and/or Usagi Yojimbo, this is the game for you. If you don't know much about either, read the comics, buy the game and then go to the library to do the background research. To jump in without doing so would be seppuku (ritual suicide).

Running the Edge Without Getting Cut
by Dale Meier

There comes a time in a cyberpunk campaign where the GM has to effectively lower the boom on his or her players. Nightmare stories are told of how the PCs manage to get their grubby little paws on some military-grade hardware and then begin wreaking havoc on the GM's campaign. In turn, the GM sics even more powerful baddies on the characters and one of two endings come about--either the PCs nuke their new opponents and take their weapons and cyberware or the PCs get nuked and the campaign ends. At any rate, a GM doesn't have to sit back and let her well-written campaign become some kind of futuristic arms race. There are a number of things they can do to keep the PCs on a technological leash. This article is mainly geared for Cyberpunk 2020, but the ideas can be applied to any cyberpunk or other SF game where technology can become overwhelming.

You want a WHAT??

"I need a SinoLogic-16, SoGo-7 Datagloves, GPL Stealth Module, one Burdyne Intelligent Translator and Thompson Eyephones."

--Johnny, "Johnny Mnemonic"

Defining the technology used in the campaign is any GM's first line of defense. What level is the technology on? Is it possible for people to "jack" into the net? Do they use the virtuality interface from Cybergeneration? Do they use VR helmets and gloves? Clunky sensory deprivation tanks? Two good examples are "Johnny Mnemonic" and "Neuromancer". In the movie version of "Johnny Mnemonic", Johnny is able to upload and download information through a neural interface plug. However, when he needs to surf the 'net, he uses a "glo-go" rig (VR helmet and gloves). In "Neuromancer", Case relies upon an electrode set for his interface with the 'net. Mixing things up with the technology can make things interesting and keeps the chrome from losing its glitter.

The easiest thing to do is go through the technical sourcebooks (e.g. the Chromebooks, Blackhand's Guide to Street Weapons, etc.) and make a list of what you're not going to allow. Be prepared to justify your decisions to the players, however. Also, be sure the players don't have an unfair advantage, such as owning sourcebooks you do not.

For example, I own all four Chromebooks and have copies of freeware supplements such as Dan Bailey's Information Overload, Morninman's Bioware Compendium, Oceanpunk and The Deep End. The first thing to get nuked was a majority of the cyberweapons in the rulebook--due to a lack of technical feasibility. With the exception of the two-shot derringer in the first Chromebook, the other cyberweapons were too unrealistic.

For example, I asked myself these and similar questions: How could someone fit a shotgun into their cyberarm with all the servos and synthetic muscles in the way? What would that do to the arm's functionality?

After that, I determined what weapons and cyber- and bioware were "restricted" or on a redlist. Powerful items, such as full-body conversions, had a serious price tag--if a PC went full 'borg they immediately became an NPC, cyberpsychotic or not. Other items were made illegal or were restricted under local, state or federal law; it wasn't that the PCs couldn't have those items, they just had to justify why they had them and were informed that there were serious consequences if they got caught with the item(s).

Finally, I laid down the law regarding what sourcebooks were "canon" in the campaign. Basically, I noted that if a character had a piece of equipment from a book I didn't have, that item didn't exist; as a result, the item was either replaced by another item of equal value or the character would received a sum of money equal to the item's value.

Money talks...

The economics are pretty bad in just about any cyberpunk game--the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. Society has been divided into the haves and the have-nots, causing some major dissention and both sides use technology (or a lack of in the case of NeoLuddites) to distinguish themselves from the opposing class. Below is a look at how each character profession in CP2020 might affect a character's cyberware and bioware purchases.

Cops: Cops sometimes have it rough when it comes down to cyberware and biotech. Most beat cops probably aren't going to have much (if any) chrome. Maybe the occasional cybernetic limb or optical or audial replacement. Most who are forced to get artificial organs are either rotated out of service or given a desk job.

However, in divisions such as Vice, Homicide, C-SWAT and other high-risk divisions, the officers will undoubtedly have some chrome up their sleeves. C-SWAT officers will undoubtedly look for items such as cyberoptics and nanoaudio rebuilds. In addition, they will probably look for reflex boosts as well. Vice officers may look for similar items while homicide detectives may concentrate on sensory enhancements.

Whether or not the department chips in for this stuff is up to the GM. In a corporate controlled environment, such as OCP in Robocop, the characters may be eligible for a certain amount in Eurodollars (e.g. $5,000 or more). However, regulations are regulations. Items such as rippers and wolvers will undoubtedly be banned. Officers possessing such cyberware would undoubtedly be forced to have the offending 'wares removed and receive a black mark on their record. Worse yet, they may come under the scrutinizing eye of Internal Affairs and be drummed out of the department. Keep a close eye on what police characters have and how they use it--it could mean their job if they abuse it.

Corporates: Corporates are primarily the "haves" in any cyberpunk campaign. They have the bucks and the contacts to make themselves "beautiful" in the gritty world they live in. However, not every corporate is into the idea of enhancing their attractiveness with cybernetics or biotech. Elderly Corporates will most likely focus on biotechnical implants and anagathics (youth drugs) and other tech to extend their lifespans. For example, in TSR's now defunct Kromosome RPG, a group known as the Gothic Circle prolonged their lives by avoiding the sunlight and squandering their profits on genetic enhancements and other life-extending technology.

"Protective countermeasures" are another necessity of corporate life. With everybody scrambling to climb the corporate ladder, it's only fitting to have a few surprises up one's sleeve. Such items could include vein clips, circulatory sphincters and toxin screening systems. Other defensive options could be of a more brutal nature, such as scratchers with built in poison glands.

Younger corporates and their children may focus on enhancements which will boost their attractiveness; and of course there are always those black sheep who use their funds to go against "Mom and Dad's wishes" and get things like reflex boosts and other "unfashionable" technology.

Medias: Being in the media spotlight means looking your best as well as being able to do your job well. In addition to the technical resources of their colleagues at the network or in the newsroom, medias have some aces up their sleeves in the way of cyberware. In addition to the occasional attractiveness enhancers, audial rebuilds and enhancements as well as tactile boosts, and cyberoptics come in handy. Vocal scramblers and other noise-screen producing items work well for protecting informant confidentiality. Radio scanner implants are another perk, especially if the police or local corp guards don't want you to know what they're up to.

Some media networks undoubtedly encourage their reporters to get fitted with enhancements to stay ahead of the competition; some even chip in for the expense! In others, enhancements are strictly the expense of the reporter. Finally, out in the boondocks--those areas where times are hard, such as Iowa--cyberware and biotech may not be an option for reporters or may even be frowned upon. ("New-fangled gadgets! Feh!")

Medtechs: Seeing a lot of duty on the mean streets of the city, medtechs have a need for a variety of cyberware and biotech. Modular tool hands come in handy as do specialized cyberoptics, audial rebuilds (you can't always hear those subtle wheezes over an AV's engines, you know), tactile boosts and protective devices, such as air filtration implants. Sometimes a patient gets a little violent, so in some cases, bone and muscle lace and grafted muscle tissue may help the medic keep them under control.

If a medtech is hired by the city, chances are they probably won't get the 'wares they want or need (with the exception of whatever their insurance covers--which won't be much). Corporate medtechs, such as those working for Trauma Team International, could be allowed a certain amount of expenditures on biotech or cyberware.

Netrunners: Netrunners are a totally different story. Most plebian corporate netrunners won't have a lot of heavy-duty, flash and flame chrome; they'll usually have enough to get them through the work week--a deck, one or two defensive programs and whatever other utilities they may need to survive in the 'net. The crackers and hackers, such as those on "Tiger Teams", are usually the ones with enough 'wares to fry your brain before you can blink. Specializing in breaking into or defending corporate computer systems, they are the elite ranks of the corporate netrunning world. These runners usually have expense accounts to cover their "needs" in defending the company's "assets".

Independents--those you find on the Streets--are usually a lot flashier and smarter than the corporate runners. Cases in point: Rache Bartmoss and Spider Murphy--two of history's most infamous netrunners. These runners usually hack out their own programs, either improving on commercial versions or creating their own. They're also more than likely to have a few enhancements on the side to get out of any tight spots in the "meat world". Such items may include cyberoptics, reflex boosts, cyberweapons, smartgun links and vehicle links.

Nomads: Being the roamers of the 21st century, nomads probably aren't going to be loaded up with a lot of chrome. First of all, replacement parts are going to be hard to find on the road; secondly, unless they just got paid, the nomads probably aren't going to have a big wad of Eurodollars to blow on whatever chrome they want. Finally, maintenance is a big chore and not every nomad pack is going to have a cybernetics expert amongst them.

Nomads usually come from all walks of life, so they will more than likely have one or two items at the most, if any. For example, a former cop-turned-nomad may have cyberoptics with low-light and anti-dazzle enhancements. A netrunner running with a nomad pack may have a deck as well as the necessary headware while a techie in a construction-focused nomad pack may have a machine interface for running heavy equipment.

Rockers: Like corporates, rockers depend a great deal on their image. Those rockers who concentrate on performance only will more than likely use biotech and cyberware to enhance their attractiveness (or detract from it in some cases) as well as their performance skills. Performance items might include tactile boosts, nano-auditory rebuilds and vocal enhancements or prosthetics.

Those rockers who use their profession to foment dissension and rebellion or to work for anti-corporate causes will more than likely have a need for cyberware or biotech of an offensive or defensive nature. Items such as reflex boosts, interfaces and smartgun links are necessary items for most rockers with a cause.

Solos: Solos are by far every GM's nightmare, especially when the Munchkin of the group insists on playing one. Most solos are former military vets, having fought in places such as South America and in the States during the Collapse. Some will undoubtedly have cybernetics or bioware, but more than likely these will be prosthetics with no special abilities. In all reality, the government would undoubtedly sponsor experiments involving cybernetic or biologically enhanced soldiers, but such individuals would be rare as the costs, both in money and lives, would be high. Most "mistakes" (read: cyberpsychoes) were usually destroyed to prevent them from becoming liabilities or were contained for further "study". Finally, the government denies the existance of any such programs, no matter what certain former veterans say.

Mercenaries and corporate solos are usually given a certain amount of wares by their employers. In addition, such enhancements are bound to have certain limitations to avoid them from becoming a threat to their employers. At any rate, the kind of hardware or software employed varies; each solo has his or her own preferences--some even prefer going "au natural" and avoid cybernetics and bioware, relying upon their own instincts, reflexes and intuition. Most of the time, solos tend to concentrate on combat-related 'wares, including reflex boosts, cyberoptics, weapon and vehicle links and bone and muscle lacing.

Techs: Techs, like netrunners, are in a realm all their own. Not all techs are chromeheads, however. Some prefer to remain separate from the machine, relying on instinct or intuition rather than getting up close and personal with technology. Those who eat, breathe and sleep chrome, will more than likely have a more cyberware than biotech in their bodies. Such items might include tool hands, machine interfaces as well as strength enhancements, reflex boosts and sensory enhancements.

The Everyman: The Everyman is the mundane sort of person--the non-hero or civilian, if you will. Regular civilians are not going to necessarily have biotech or cybernetic implants with perhaps the exception of replacement organs and limbs. Even then, higher end models of such items will be expensive and not everybody's insurance will necessarily cover such items. In addition, kids are unlikely to have any kind of cybernetics as it can have adverse physical effects on preteens' growth and development. For GMs looking for a good reference, check out p. 17 of "Home of the Brave" which states:

> "The effects of cyberware are very tricky in young people, especially in
> children who are going through the changes of puberty... Because of this,
> most licensed cyberware dealers will not even talk to a preteen. The majority
> of Nanotech, Optics, Audio and Neuralware has no adverse effect after
> age 10. Any type of Reflex Boost will cause debilitating growth pains. Muscle
> and Bone Lace stops all skeletal (Body) development. Grafted Muscle does
> not grow properly. Most other cyberware must be replaced at each age level,
> as the body grows. New studies have shown that children age 10-12 can
> assimilate headware with little or no humanity loss. Even to age sixteen, the
> amount of trauma is greatly reduced..."

Please note, in the first paragraph, I said kids were unlikely to have cyberware or biotech. There are exceptions, such as Europe's "Goldenkids" and those poor souls who are "volunteered" for corporate biotech experiments. In addition, "cyberevolved" teenagers are another feasible exception as shown in Cybergeneration.

In short, your normal citizen isn't going to be stocked to the gills in chrome like some CP2020 and Shadowrun writers would have you believe.

Sorry, but it's the Law

"Go ahead and do it--dead or alive, you're coming with me."
--Murphy, "Robocop"

The law is a very effective tool to use against munchkin players. Unfortunately, some GMs just don't have the guts to call in C-SWAT when the group's ultra-Dragoon borg goes cyberpsycho in the local mall. Many states, especially "free states" such as Texas and the Californias have specific laws regarding what are legal and illegal 'wares. Such differences of legal opinion may even go down as far as varying from county to county or city to city.

An excellent way to hassle your players is to make up a system of laws regarding cyberware, biotech and any other troublesome gear. Does the group's Netrunner have a sweet new prog that can make Demons a pile of neon sushi in nanoseconds? Write up a statute declaring all altered, pirated or non-commercial software illegal ("Pardon me, sir, may I see your software registration?" **ZAP!**). Got a Solo who likes to walk down the street hefting his assault rifle? Hit him with a weapons permit violation and have the weapon confiscated. Just be sure you remain consistent and keep the codes from various areas straight.

"He doesn't have a name... he's product!"

If the PCs are working for a major corporation, such as Arasaka, Petrochem or Biotechnica, chances are their company issue gear will have some preprogrammed and predesigned limitations. Weapons may have special chips built in to prevent them from being fired within an exec's office; software may be specially written to prevent a Netrunner from cracking into his boss's files on the company mainframe. Even Robocop had built-in limitations with Directive 4.

However, these shouldn't be permanent setbacks--there should be some kind of loophole to allow the characters to get out of trouble when they really need to. For example, in the final scenes of Robocop, Murphy couldn't open fire on Dick Jones or arrest him because he was an OCP employee. Once the CEO fired him, Murphy had no problem ventilating the villain.

"The Catch" on page 94 of the CP2020 rulebook has plenty of ideas of how a corporation or government agency can control characters with cyberware. Such measures include lethal glitches, holding a loved one hostage, remote detonators, blackmail and implant monitors.

"When in Rome..."

Fashion is another deciding factor in cyberware and biotech. Anybody who's somebody in the chrome and glitter world of Cyberpunk has to look fashionable--even when they screw up. Some clubs will undoubtedly have dress codes which must be followed for access. Others may have "unwritten" dress codes where anybody who stands out is either mobbed or kicked out by the crowd. Some items, such as Gene-Tek's See-It transparent skin (see Chromebook 3, pg. 35), are just plain passe and scream "Loser!" Such fashion faux pas are sure to either ruin or at least diminish an Edgerunner's reputation in some circles.

It might be a good idea to take a look at the trends in today's society to get a feel how trends flow through nations. For example, what's trendy on either coast may not come "into vogue" in the Midwest for two or three years (or even more). What's more, trendy items in the Midwest may not make it on the coasts and vice versa. Trends can even vary from community to community, so keep a sharp eye on how trends change from place to place.

All that glitters...

"I had a guaranteed military sale with ED-209! Renovation programs,
spare parts for 25 years--who cares if it worked or not!"
--OCP Exec Dick Jones, "Robocop"

Sometimes what may seem to be a good thing isn't. Experimental biotech goes bad, killing the user; cyberware suddenly goes on the fritz, causing consumer injuries or even deaths. Biotech and cyberware flaws are possibly the most insidious and dangerous problems characters can face. Sometimes the item has a side effect or two that pops up in one out of every ten or one out of every hundred people due to their body chemistry; of course, the odds could be a lot higher or lower as well. Knockoffs of popular items may be faulty or outright lethal in some cases. In others, the brand name items could be the killers. These difficulties can easily hamper a PC's performance and make them a liability to their group, their employer or to society in general.

Of course, not all biotech and cyberware flaws are unintentional. Some companies will naturally cut corners and costs in the quest for profits--OCP's ED-209 in Robocop and Murphy's "replacement" in Robocop II are clear cut examples of this. In other cases, corporate moles may sabotage certain projects in order to give their employer a foothold in certain markets. Gangs may even bring in pirated wares to sell on the black market. At any rate, using such flaws should be done with thought and kept to a minimum to avoid making them seem too common.

"She cannae take anymore, Cap'n!"

The human body is a remarkable machine and cybernetics can make it even more so. Unfortunately, even the body has its limits. While cyberlimbs may let a character lift a car unaided or outrun those gangers down the street, the flesh and bone they're anchored to can only handle so much stress. The first warning sign should be muscle pulls, spasms and bruising. If the player doesn't figure it out, move on to broken bones, dislocations and other nasty injuries. Such injuries (and the medical bills associated with them) should give the player a good idea of what is to come if their character doesn't take better care of him or herself.

Allergies, immunological deficiencies and infections are also hazards that can be associated with cyber- and bioware. According to Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net, the pre-2016 interface plugs were large enough that part of the meninges--the membrane surrounding the brain--could poke through if the user incurred some kind of neural trauma. This leaves the character's brain open to infection by viral or bacterial meningitis--two serious diseases which can be fatal if not treated properly and quickly. A character who has an allergic reaction to the metal or some other material in their cyber- or bioware will undoubtedly have a miserable existence unless they can get the process reversed. In some cases, such as reflex boosting, the process is irreversible, meaning the character must either learn to live with the pain or take some kind of drug to diminish, mask or otherwise negate the symptoms.

Immunological deficiencies are another risk associated with cyber- and bioware. Because of the invasive nature of the surgery and the fact that something foreign is being introduced into a person's body, the immune system may either attack that material or may be irrepairably damaged. New diseases or rejection syndromes, such as Biotech Rejection Syndrome (BTRS), Cybernetic Immunodeficiency Syndrome (CIDS) or Cybernetic Rejection Syndrome (CRS) could pop up. These illnesses would require the character to take costly (but effective) anti-rejection drugs or antibiotics to avoid becoming ill or even dying. Modern-day examples of this are the recipients of the Jarvik artificial heart in the 1980s and any organ transplant patient.

On the downside, such drugs could also affect the body's performance, especially when bioware is concerned. The new additions to the character's body might work but they may work sluggishly, or even worse, they may work too well, requiring another drug to keep the bioware under control. Use side effects and potential problems with discretion. The drugs also give the villains a bit of an edge. Say for instance that a cop has some bioware installed. Now, the local drug kingpin has a good sized share in the hospital's stock, not to mention a few contacts in the pharmacy who skim a little off the top when new supplies come in. Suddenly, the cop finds himself between a rock and a hard place. In order to get the anti-rejection drugs he needs, he has to look the other way and leave the kingpin's business alone. If he starts investigating and makes a few arrests related to the drug business, his lifeline may suddenly dry up, placing him in dire straits when his immune system decides the bioware in his body is an intruder.

Allergies are another common side effect. Invariably, a character may have an allergic reaction to some of the materials used in the cyber- or bioware's construction. The effects can range from the merely annoying, such as a rash, unstoppable itch or heat spasms to life threatening reactions such as internal bleeding, chemical imbalances and systemic deterioration. The symptoms may also come and go depending on certain variables, such as temperature, barometric pressure, humidity, etc. Again, drugs are an option for controlling all but the most life-threatening of allergic reactions. However, it may be possible for a character to get the same kind of bio- or cyberware made up of hypo-allergenic or other alternative materials--at a higher price, of course.

If the player decides the only way to go is with a full body replacement, kindly tell them to hand over their character for NPC duty once the changes are made. Other alternatives to this player solution could include cyberpsychosis (see the following section) and social reactions ranging from avoidance of the character to discrimination or even open bigotry.

"They're coming to take me away, ha ha!"

Cyberpsychosis is another problem associated with cybernetics. Replacing one's own flesh and blood with metal undoubtedly has an effect on a person. In general, CP2020 deems this as a loss of Empathy toward humanity, eventually leading to psychotic behavior and even an invulnerability complex.

To be honest, not everybody is that fragile and the circumstances behind the implants will have a different effect on each person. If the implantation of bio- or cyberware is essential to saving a life, such as replacing a damaged organ or limb, the humanity (or essence) loss should be minimal. The character may have to take time to get use to the new part and may have to adjust their lifestyle (*"You have a new stomach, Mr. Caine--but remember--no spicy foods!"*). If the surgery is elective, however, stick the PC with the full humanity cost. Enhancements to existing cybernetics or bioware should also have an effect dependent upon the circumstances.

Should the player go a bit overboard, inflict some social angst on them. Their excitement and enthusiasm over getting new body parts will probably not sit well with some members of society, including some of those close to the PC. This can lead to some disillusionment, either with the cybernetics or with humanity in general ("They just don't understand! I can see so much better than they do!"). Also, a cyberpsychotic character may not have full control of their faculties. They may do things out of their control, such as accidentally injure someone or even have cases where they black out and do something they can't or would rather not remember doing (like killing someone). These things should be left up to the GM to decide and should be a warning sign that the PC has gone too far too fast with the implants.

As a result of such behavior, counseling with a cyberpsychologist is a possibility, provided the character has not degenerated too far. In a worst case scenario, the character becomes uncontrollable and must be subdued or taken out by a C-SWAT team.

Endgame

These are only a few suggestions as each GM has his or her own way of handling power-mad players and whatnot. By laying down the law and remaining consistent, a GM has a fighting chance of restoring order to a cyberpunk campaign. After all, cyberpunk isn't about who's got the bigger gun, now isn't it?

The Dragon and the Cross
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I started gaming during the "Satanic Panic" of the 1980s, around the time I was nearing confirmation. At first I was very confused and concerned at how I could balance my gaming and my devotion to God. During that time, I was definitely caught between a rock and a hard place. I was constantly hearing about how "satanic" fantasy games were and how it led kids to become obsessed with their fantasy lives and roam around sewers. Meanwhile, my logical side couldn't see how RPGs were "wrong." Of course, things got worse before they got better. After reading that RPGs could be addictive in Ian Livingstone's Dicing With Dragons (one of the first RPG guides on the market), I quickly piled all my D&D stuff into a paper sack and shoved it to the back of my closet.

Two years later, Star Wars: The RPG came out in 1987 and I was back in the saddle again for RPGs. Of course, that still didn't end my concerns. The worst confirmation present (all of my other presents were perfectly fine, by the way) I ever received was a book entitled What's Right, What's Wrong in an Upside-Down World. The book was written as a moral guide to Christian teens--normally a good idea, except that some of the reasoning behind it seemed to be a bit flaky and faulty. In one chapter, the author bashed RPGs, rock

music, soap operas et. al as being wrong simply because they were "just wrong"--no real reasons, only one or two scriptural passages and the concept that they were "just wrong." This threw me for a major loop and I spent a few weeks trying to get my head around the issue of Christianity and gaming.

Anyhow, as time passed, I came to the conclusion that there is such a thing as a Christian gamer just as there are Christian SF and fantasy authors. Through college I read various arguments from both sides of the battle concerning whether or not gamers can truly be Christians and vice versa. When I started writing Tales, I was still getting my head around the topic as the arguments and threads I had read were sometimes very vitriolic, especially on the Christian newsgroups and from the Christian point of view.

Today, the concept of "Christian gaming" is one which continues to intrigue, elude and sometimes even frighten both gamers and Christians alike (including myself) and it seems to be a concept which is growing, albeit at a slow pace. DragonRaid, the first of the Christian RPGs, was a big surprise to both the gaming and Christian communities during the Satan-panicked '80s. Looked at with disdain by most gamers and shot out of the sky by fundies touting claims of satanism and New Age teachings, the game died a quick and silent death. Now DragonRaid is seeing a revival and is being accompanied by games such as Redemption (both a Christian CCG and a Dungeon!-esque boardgame), Crossroads and Michael Dyer's Holy War RPG. Of course, you don't need to run out and buy a game such as DragonRaid to be a Christian gamer or run a Christian campaign--almost any game, "Christian" or "secular," will do. By the way, by writing this article, I'm not saying that you should forget about games such as DragonRaid or Crossroads, all I'm saying is that you don't have to run out and shell out $20-30 for a new game if you want to run a Christian campaign.

Before we dive in, we have to define what Christian RPGs and Christian RPG campaigns are. This varies from gamer to gamer; my own definition of a Christian RPG or Christian RPG campaign is this: a roleplaying game or roleplaying campaign designed to teach others (including the GM) about Christian morality and beliefs while allowing the group to have a good time.

Note that I said teach not convert. Some Christians believe that a Christian RPG's objective is to convert. My own belief is that conversion to Christianity from another religion or even from one Christian denomination to another is a personal decision, one that cannot be made for the person and should definitely not be forced. Although a conversion to Christianity could always result from the campaign, you should never force someone to convert against their will.

What genres and games work?

Actually, almost any game not based on a licensed setting (e.g. Star Wars, Star Trek, etc.) works rather well, but there are a few that present some problems or require some tweaking. Below are just a few examples of how Christian campaigns could be run in various genres and games; this is not an overview of all genres--only the ones that I feel I am competent to comment on:

Cyberpunk: Cyberpunk makes for a rather rough and tumble genre for running a Christian campaign, but also allow for an interesting look into how Christianity can change (for better or worse). In Cyberpunk 2020, the Night City sourcebook mentions "Vatican III" several times, indicating that some changes were made in the Roman Catholic religion to keep with the changes of the time. Shadowrun's timeline also presents a number of changes in the Christian religion due to the return of magic to Earth and the Awakening.

Running a Christian campaign in the cyberpunk genre also raises the questions of morality, violence and mature subjects (drugs, STDs, crime, etc.). Because it is a somewhat violent, it almost seems as though the entire genre is antithetical to the message of Christ--"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." However, messages such as forgiveness, redemption and justice can be presented in a Christian Cyberpunk campaign. For example, one of the NPCs in my now defunct campaign was a South Am vet (the son of a cop) who blamed himself for his father's death; another NPC, a colleague of the first, was a recovering drug addict. At different points in the campaign, both were to go through a crisis and experience

some form of redemption. As for the PCs, their faith and redemption depended upon the actions and decisions of their players. Shadowrun also presents such subjects, but with an added question--how would God accept metahumans and others in His world?

Fantasy: Fantasy is perhaps one of the easier genres to create a Christian campaign in. With AD&D, all you really need is the three core books (Player's Handbook, DM's Guide and Monstrous Manual) and books such as The Chronicles of Narnia or The Singer Trilogy and your own bible and faith to act as guides in creating an allegorical world. Other games present worlds which may be adjusted or tweaked to become a Christian allegory. Earthdawn and Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay quickly come to mind, each having their own unique qualities as well as shared problems. Both game worlds come with their own pantheons, both of which I've seen as being incompatible with Christianity or a Christian allegory. Here are two ways to figure this problem out: 1) Either wipe out the entire pantheon, leaving just the allegorical religion in place, or 2) Write in an allegorical form of Christianity for the game world and denounce the other pantheon as being false. For example, in Warhammer, I decided to leave the regular pantheon of gods, goddesses and Chaos gods in place, denouncing them as false. In the Old World, the evil and Chaos gods are daemon servants of Tharus, the Dark One, as are the forces behind such gods and goddess as Ulric, Ranald, Myrmidia and others.

Pendragon and Prince Valiant are also excellent games for running Christian campaigns in. Pendragon's passions and personality traits allow for some kind of measurement of a character's standing both socially and spiritually while Prince Valiant's simple rules allow for quick and easy play without a large number of rules getting in the way. If you're looking for a game which has a well-detailed magic system and medieval setting, Ars Magica may be another option. I have heard from players and GMs of the game that the setting and magic system are well done.

Horror: Having caught flak from just about every corner of both the hobby and Christianity, horror RPGs present an interesting case for a Christian campaign. From my observations, In Nomine seems to be the easiest to set up for a Christian campaign, since it is already firmly set in the war between the Divine and the Infernal. That's not to say there aren't things that need to be changed in In Nomine--there are a few bits, such as the politicking among the archangels, which I prefer to dump, but nothing too major.

Another system which has potential is the Storyteller system by White Wolf Games Studio. Although I haven't been too hep on the attitude copped by White Wolf and some of its publics, the idea of a vampire hunter campaign is interesting. Add to this other complications, such as one of the PCs happening to be a werewolf, throw in adversaries and allies such as the Inquisition and the federal government's Project: Twilight, and you've got a potent brew for some interesting situations.

Call of Cthulhu is a bit tougher, however. The stereotypical campaign is rather nihilistic and ends when all or most of the PCs winding up insane or dead; not a pleasant ending for the good guys. Also, in some campaigns it seems as though God is completely non-existent or the premise of "We have seen the enemy and it is (an Elder) God!" is featured. A fan of "The X-Files", I recently decided to write an article entitled "The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail..." to even the battlefield between Christians and "the Mythos" in CoC. I also ran a very short-lived Christian CoC PBEM game based on Millennium and Delta Green.

Historical: Historical games, such as GURPS Old West and TSR's late, great Boot Hill and Gangbusters RPGs offer some interesting possibilities as well. A Christian campaign could center on the plight of Native Americans and settlers in the wild west or even troublesome times in history, such as the Crusades. GURPS has a number of fitting sourcebooks which detail historical eras; Ars Magica would also be a fitting game for running a Christian campaign set during the Crusades. I've even heard of one group running a Reformation-era Ars Magica campaign.

Modern Day: Modern day or conspiracy games also offer a lot of intrigue. Christian conspiracy novels have taken off with such books as "Gideon's Torch," "Blood Moon," and "Blood of Heaven". Just about any conspiracy game such as GURPS Illuminati, Top Secret/SI, or Millenium's End would probably work well as would Call of Cthulhu in combination with Pagan Publishing's Delta Green sourcebook and the 1990s

Licensed Games: Licensed games present some problems when trying to run a Christian campaign. Games such as Star Wars, Star Trek, and others make it somewhat difficult to bring Christian overtones into a game without disrupting the game setting and atmosphere. However, some, such as Marvel Super Heroes, DC Heroes and the Indiana Jones RPG from West End's Masterbook series presents an interesting setting and a lot of material to draw from for a Christian campaign. WWII seems to have a crusade atmosphere from a religious point of view and any number of Christian artifacts ranging from the Spear of Caspa to the Fourth Nail (which was the subject of an old TSR Indiana Jones adventure) can become targets for the Third Reich.

Fine Tuning--Balancing out the game and scripture

Running a Christian campaign is a real balancing act; a GM must be able to keep the setting, tone and game rules balanced with the scripture in order to prevent the game from losing sight of its mission and to also prevent it from becoming sickly sweet or a "Christian hack-and-slash" session. An example (in my opinion) of an off-balance Christian RPG is DragonRaid. Having read through the rules I downloaded from the Web, DragonRaid doesn't really present a realistic Christian allegory--instead it takes on more of a "Christian DOOM" tone; monsters such as dragons and goblins are labeled with sins and the PCs are told, "Okay--nuke 'em. It's alright, it's for God and the greater good!" Although the game claims to be influenced by Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia and the allegory and background it first presents are interesting, the rules and the rest of the allegory are poorly handled.

My own opinion is that a Christian campaign has to present the issues of sin and Christian morality in a realistic way in order to have an effect. In other words--the characters' actions will have consequences--sometimes serious ones--that affect their lives not just ethically, morally and physically, but also spiritually.

The first thing to do is create a mission statement--what do you want to do or teach with this campaign? For example, here is the mission statement from my old Cyberpunk 2020 campaign, "The Equalizers":

"The Equalizers" is meant to be my first Cyberpunk campaign and also my first experience in bringing Christianity into a modern-day/futuristic setting . It is meant to be a look at sin, faith and redemption in the dark future of 2020 and how the spiritual war between Good and Evil escalates as the times and technology change.

The next thing to do is to take a look at the setting of the game and determine what kind of events could take place to affect the lives of the characters and how their actions would also affect them. For example, if a character in a Cyberpunk campaign takes a risk and seduces a female corporate in order for her secrets, he may suddenly find himself a victim of AIDS-II or another serious disease. If a character uses drugs, he or she may find themselves in serious trouble with the law, their friends or even in serious medical trouble. If a character has a family to raise or is taking care of younger siblings while balancing out some career as a mercenary or other "undesirable", social workers can provide some trouble for the character.

I know I make it sound easy, but it's not--balancing both the scripture side and the game side of a Christian campaign is hard work. For some games, such as Pendragon or In Nomine, it may be easier because of the nature of the setting and the rules, but other games, such as Cyberpunk and Warhammer FRP present real problems. The problem I have found with both is that it can sometimes be too easy to go overboard on the violence and gore. Both WFRP and CP2020 have game worlds which are gritty and violent and both are in the grips of darkness in one form or another. This is not to say that bad things won't happen to the characters and their friends in a Christian campaign--it's just that the GM and players have to set limits, as is common in all RPG campaigns. For example, in reading Christian fiction, I have noticed that violence is softened a bit--not described as gorily or dramatically in other books, but described just enough to leave room for the imagination and have an impact.

Sources

Here are a few suggestions for sources; by the way, I do not endorse or follow the beliefs and values of Texe Marrs and Pat Robertson. Their books are here merely as sources for conspiracy games. One final note--I have not included any historical fiction books in this section due to the sheer number of titles which have entered the Christian fiction market and the fact that I have yet to read any Christian historical fiction.

"The Silmarillion," "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings" by J.R.R. Tolkien--Almost everybody is familiar with Tolkien's work. I would recommend reading the last two while using "The Silmarillion" as a reference. I tried reading "The Silmarillion" once--and only once--in high school. While Tolkien's history of Middle Earth is in depth and well-written, it is also very heavy reading.

"Camber of Culdi" and "Saint Camber" by Katherine Kurtz--Kurtz presents an interesting look at how Christianity might co-exist with an innately magical race. Pendragon would most likely be my choice for a system for such a setting. Unfortunately, I have yet to read Kurtz's other Deryni books.

"A Rare Benedictine" and "Monk's Hood" by Ellis Peters--Ellis Peters' "Cadfael" novels are an excellent source for GMs looking to inject some intrigue and mystery into theirfantasy campaigns. These novels are exceptional sources for Pendragon and Ars Magica GMs.

"The Singer Trilogy" by Calvin Miller--Miller's "Singer Trilogy" puts a new spin on the New Testament by transplanting the scripture into another time and place. The connections beween the two are not always evident and sometimes confusing, but the trilogy does make for compelling reading. Miller's poetic style fits well and keeps the story flowing.

"The Princess and Curdie" by George MacDonald--The predecessor of Lewis, MacDonald's books are probably one of the earliest known Christian fantasy works. Other novels in the series include "The Princess and the Goblin", "The Lost Princess" and "The Golden Key and Other Stories".

"The Screwtape Letters" by C.S. Lewis--Looking for some Infernal inspiration? "The Screwtape Letters" is a perfect source for all kinds of moral and ethical dilemmas.

"The Chronicles of Narnia" by C.S. Lewis--Although some may say these books are for kids, I enjoyed reading them in high school as well as watching what few videos wereproduced of Lewis' books. I highly recommend this series as a source for anyone considering running a Christian fantasy campaign not based in medieval Europe.

"Redwall" by Brian Jacques--Jacques' storytelling style and morality in his novels is exempliary. I have not only used this as a source for Christian roleplaying ideas, but also as a source for my Pendragon campaign. I highly recommend all of his Redwall novels.

Anything by Stephen R. Lawhead--Steven R. Lawhead has written some great books, and some not-so-great books. I would highly recommend any of his fantasy fiction, including "Byzantium" to GMs looking for ideas for a Christian RPG or campaign. His science ficition--namely the Empyrion duology--is not that great, however. Other writings by Lawhead which come to mind include "The Dragon King Trilogy," "The Pendragon Trilogy" and "The Paradise War Trilogy".

"The End of the Age" by Pat Robertson--Pat's fiction writing is very flat and has little flavor, but the premise of the story might be of interest to Christian GMs and players.

"Enemy Mine" by Barry B. Longyear and David Gerrold-- "Enemy Mine" is an excellentstory of cooperation, survival and learning. I also recommend the movie--the FX aren't the greatest, but the story is still excellent.

"Circle of Intrigue" by Texe Marrs--Players and GMs of In Nomine, Call of Cthulhu, GURPS Illuminati, and Conspiracy X would do well to check this book out. In it, Marrs details the Illuminati, its members as well as other organizations bent on world domination, including the (gasp) Freemasons.

"Blood of Heaven" by Bill Myers--What do you get when you mix a convicted Death Row inmate and a genetics experiment involving the blood of Christ? A lot of trouble; although I haven't finished reading this one yet, the moral dilemmas and ethical issues in this book are excellent stuff for In Nomine adventures.

"Millennium's Eve" and "Millennium's Dawn" by Ed Stewart--A conspiracy duology, these two novels cover the events of the turn of the century. "Eve" starts out on Christmas Eve 1999 and involves a journalist and an LA cop in a race to stop a conspiracy to assassinate America's top Christian leaders. "Dawn" embroils the same two characters in a chase to save a couple embroiled in a web of deceit, blackmail and terror.

"This Present Darkness" and "Piercing the Darkness" by Frank Peretti--A fitting pair of books for In Nomine players and GMs, Peretti looks at spiritual warfare mainly through the eyes of angels, demons and Soldiers. I highly recommend these books for anybody who wants a feel for playing a character in In Nomine.

"The Apparition" and "The Apparition: Visitations" --Caliber Comics has a good thing going with this black and white format comic book. "The Apparition" details the spiritual adventures and missions of the angel Adriel and the people whose lives he touches. The second book, "Visitations" is a trade paperback of short "Apparition" stories taken from back issues of "Negative Burn," a digest published by Caliber.

Kurt Busieck's "Astro City"-- "Astro City" is by far one of the freshest books I've ever seen in the superhero genre. The writers don't fall back on the old ploy of "Mutant, mutant, angst, angst" (to quote a song parody from X-Factor) or guys (and gals) with huge pecs and guns. Instead, they give us a modern day city with Golden and Silver-age style heroes who have their own ups and downs. Back issues of the second series are hard to find, but there is a trade paperback compiling the first series.

Conclusion

This is far from a complete article and I recommend anyone seeking to create a Christian RPG or RPG campaign to rely upon sources beyond this article, including the theological and writing help of a minister. What I have just presented is all I know and feel--I'm sure there are holes here and there and I welcome anyone and everyone's input on this subject.

IR Commentary:

Wow--I'm already six issues behind already! Guess I'd better get in gear.

IR #29

Rich Staats: This three-legged pig, what's the story behind it? Is it an individual cursed and polymorphed into the form of a pig? Is it a would-be pet that seemed to follow the group? If you can't answer because of players reading the 'zine, just drop me a line by e-mail. I'm interested in how this critter is showing up in your campaign. As for conspiring with Rebecca on MAGECon South, I don't think so. I haven't been to a MAGECon in the past couple of years due to a lack of funds. Hopefully I'll be able to make it in the new year. From my point of view, there is a disparity in the gaming activities of the age groups. The younger ones tend to hang around playing with their cardboard crack while the older ones tend to play RPGs and wargames like Squad Leader, Warhammer, et.al. However, having lived in the Ames area, I have to admit I have seen a shift with a number of younger people getting involved with the area Warhammer league. I guess there is at least one thing positive to be said for GW's "Chapter Approved" program. Glad you liked my reviews.

Joseph Teller: In case I never e-mailed you about putting my reviews up on the web, go ahead and do it. In fact, you can put them all up there. Intriguing review on the CD set for Lachesis Passage and the book "Forever Knight: Intimations of Mortality." I may have to seek them out.

Rebecca Teed: Woody Harrelson plays On the Edge? Scary. He used to be one of my favorite actors during his Cheers days--now I find him annoying. I have to honestly say that I'll never truly understand why conventions have to have event players vote to see who was the "best" roleplayer. I think it's rather elitist in a way and leads to a lot of favoritism, especially in a game where the GM knows most of the players. I laughed out loud while reading your take on the NPCs I presented. I too think they'd beat the snot out of Sylvre Phire before getting along fine. I hope MAGECon South picks up as well, though I've heard mixed reviews about Cy-Con in Ames...

George Phillies: RAEBNC

Timothy E. Emrick: Loved your mad take on "Hakuna Matata." I'm sure it had everybody in your group waving their tentacles for more ;)

David E. Dickie: RAEBNC

David Dunham: Interesting events in your campaign. Have you made any changes or updates to your PenDragon Pass rules since you started using them?

Collie Collier: About people getting ruder as time passes--I agree anonymity has something to do with it. It always seems the biggest jerks on the Internet are the ones with the most anonymity. Just once I'd like to see the look on some mook's face when he's met in real life by someone he insulted on the Internet.

IR #30

Kiralee McCauley: Interesting world. I'd be interested to know how any campaign you ran or played in this world went. As to Star Wars, I like the setting mainly because I grew up with it--collected the figures and ships as a kid and saw all the movies, even the Ewok movies on TV. It was the first SF I cut my teeth on as a child, you could say. Thanks for your input on my scenario "The Adventure of the Whispering Hill." As to the changes in CoC created by my "The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail...", yes, it does change the paradigm of the game quite a bit. Still, I'd rather give my players a fighting chance against the Mythos than simply depress everyone in the group (including myself) by having everybody's characters eventually get killed or driven insane.

Rich Staats: Congratulations on your wedding! RAEBNC

George Phillies: Sorry to hear your novel didn't get bought. I wish you luck in the future with the venture.

Dana Erlandson: Intriguing recount of your experience with gaming groups. Mine haven't been that interesting. Perhaps that's a good thing...

Collie Collier: RAEBNC

Joseph Teller: I know the feeling about burning yourself out in PBEMs and PBMs. I'm experiencing a rather high frustration level with my Star Trek PBEM as players who were once normal posters are now intermittent posters. As a result, this frustrates me and makes me a bit apathetic. It would seem my politeness is my weakness here. Do you have any recommendations besides using a whip, a chair and a pistol?

David Dickie: Re:Traveller mechanics--probably Marc Miller himself, though I'm not so sure he'd give a satisfactory answer considering his current track record in the industry.

Cindy Shettle: Welcome to the IR crew! You've got quite a history in the hobby, I must say. Thanks for your comments on my Pendragon adventure. As for the magic system, as far as I know, there are no official rules for characters with fae blood, though the new edition of Pendragon by Green Knight may answer that question.

Magic talents are strictly determined by a character's profession and their level of skill (e.g. whether an enchantress is only a beginner, a witch or a crone, etc.) The fact that you mention spells specifically would indicate to me that you played one of the three earlier editions, not the current fourth ed. which has a very well-done magic system. To be honest, I don't know how I would handle the allowance of spells in an early edition Pendragon game. Magic in the Arthurian legends is potent stuff and has to be handled carefully with respect to game balance. As a result, most PCs in a Pendragon game will be knights rather than clergy or magicians.

Timothy Emrick: Congratulations on your wedding as well! Man, looking at your history since IR #28, you've been busy! Intriguing comments on "The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail..." Yes, I realize it changes the axioms. My players have been less aware as they aren't that familiar with Lovecraft. The reason I wrote the article was mainly because of Lovecraft's atheistic and nihilistic view.

Rebecca Teed: A character that could fly at 200 MPH after changing into a 4 oz. bat? Eek. Well, at least he didn't have to worry about smacking into cars... Great art in this issue!

IR #31, 33,34 & 35:

RAEBNC; As my New Year's Resolution, I resolve to work on comments regularly as well as pay more attention to the APA deadlines. As an aside, I'd just like to say congratulations to Elizabeth McCoy on her ascendance to In Nomine line editor and extend my sympathies on the loss of her cat. Felines are truly unique creatures, regardless of what ardent dog lovers say about them ;) Also, interesting stories of character blunders and whatnot in IR #35--I really enjoyed them.

IR #32

Rich Staats: Yes and no--my group is pretty much scattered due to college and other activities. I'm in the process of trying to form another one, if I can ever get a session set up...

Cindy Shettle: Discrepancies in a TV show/movie's background are always a point of fan debate as is canonicity. Case in point: Star Trek Voyager and the TrekRPG mailing list. Arguments about what is and isn't canon have been raging ever since the latter half of 1999 with the flashpoint being an episode of ST Voyager

and an unexplained discrepancy in Trek history caused by Rick Berman (aka the "Anti-Gene" for the amount of "damage" he's caused to Roddenberry's universe). I tend to stick to my own conventions regarding canonicity and stay as far away from such debates as I can. As a result of all the whining and backbiting going on at the TrekRPG corral, I simply left the list and never went back.

Dana J. Erlandson: Intriguing themes. Give up gaming? Never! Well, maybe for Lent--but only for Lent!

Collie Collier: Enjoyed the article on spandex. As for the TWH cover you ended with, did it not make print because of the APA's demise or because of other reasons?

JosephTeller: Your Magical Mystery Tours Unlimited sounds similar to the infamous "Tragic School Bus" setting for Teenagers from Outer Space that occasionally appears at GenCon. I think I might try using MMTU for TFOS once--muahahahaha!!!!

George Phillies: RAEBNC

Scott Ruggels: Welcome to IR! As I told Cindy above, politics and backbiting were the prime reason I left the TrekRPG discussion list. It just got too much to see so many people hammering on each other when all I was looking for was a few good ships and characters to add to my files. Great art--did you create those dragon warriors yourself? Were they inspired by a game or novel?

Kiralee McCauley: Good luck with GMing your first campaign. What game is it going to be set in and how many players do you have? D'Val seems to be an interesting character. So what campaign does he and his fellow characters appear in?

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The Sign Of The Dancing Priestess #7

Personal Notes

Well, most of my life right now seems to be spent in anticipating the future, rather than doing much in the present. The future, in this case, is Arisia (I'm on the panels, eep!) and my company's move, which by a quirk of fate is on the same weekend. This gives me a perfect excuse to avoid the whole thing - most of us are expected to work that weekend - but means it will be impossible to find all my files. Such is life in the corporate world. Meanwhile, I'm looking at the list of panels I'm on, going, "I signed up for that? What was I thinking?"

Gaming And The Millennium

Most people view the 'new' millennium as a time of change. As if the new must, by definition, be different from the old. As if growth or decay can always be defined in terms of before and after, with the moment of change caught and imprisoned, contained within a single second. It doesn't work that way. Or, to put it another way, no, I don't think anything in gaming will change, just because the date suddenly has a two in it all the time. But the idea of the Millennium, and our reaction to it - that has affected gaming, just as it has affected the culture at large.

I have a theory that, while we go on with our logical lives, making our logical plans, something in our hindbrian is convinced that all those zeros really mean something. Maybe it's cultural conditioning, or a miasma spreading through the collective unconscious from the minds of some to the minds of many. Maybe it's just a side effect of living in a largely christian culture, where tales of the millennium still resonate, even if it is no longer part of mythology / philosophy of salvation and life after death. For the most part it doesn't affect science or business. Instead it affects our dreams, both those we dream at night, and those we dream in the day to entertain ourselves (The ones we dream in the day are just more obvious.) Sometimes stories, or the premise of a T.V. series meant to capitalize on events, sometimes just trends moving through the liquid flow of culture like a wave. Here are the sinuous forms of three such beasts.

The first, the broadest, and least interesting is the theme of *physical disaster by scientific means*, mimicking the disaster of the apocalypse. The genre started with the cold war and nuclear annihilation, but now it includes environmental disasters (a la Waterworld), plagues, asteroids, and Y2K. Even in the beginning, especially in the beginning, people saw the link - the 'ultimate weapon' discovered only 50 years before the turn of the millennium. As if there was anything 'ultimate' about the bomb, as if it wasn't possible to create a deadlier, more dangerous, weapon (try Star Wars). As if technology was even necessary to make war devastating. And yet, here was the end of the world, the survivors crawling through the wreckage of civilization, the long slow decline into night. Once created, once blessed with the stamp of scientific possibility, never to be forgotten. The obvious inheritors of this trend in gaming were the settings like Gamma World and Twilight 2000. But there were less obvious inheritors, fantasy worlds like Tekumel and Ketham, which turned out to be the remains of far grander civilizations.

The second, the subtlest, trend is that of the fin de siecle, the jaded moment before renewal, when everything seems to have been done already and nothing new exists, when the culture eats itself, combining are recombining elements we've seen before. Gregorian chant in rap music - which isn't so new, just look at "Ya Got Trouble" (right here in River City) from 1957, and the Pope selling indulgences. Corsets and Bell Bottoms and the new interest in Swing. Or for that matter the Goths, nineteen century romantism married to eighties punk / hard rock, with a dash of dark age barbarian viciousness. And of course, the fascination with history, the genre of the historical. Victorian Era games, Pulp Era games, games set in 17th century France and feudal Japan. Most notable, the universal and multi-genre systems that allow you to jump from one historical setting to another. GURPS may be the best example, but Shadow Binding also followed this trend, with variations on the Victorian Era, The Fifties, and a Pulp version of the Thirties as the major settings. Now, as the Millennium passes, we've abandoned the trend in favor of the future.

The third, the most obvious, trend is religion. Not the use of scripture, but the use of religious icons, demons and angels, vampires and werewolves. In Nominee is only the most obvious example of war in heaven brought to Earth for the enlightenment of gamers. And other religions, most notably masons and discordians, have gifted us with husked remains, the shadow of beliefs sucked dry of substance. In this case, conspiracies, magical and otherwise, and the illuminati. An entire genre of gaming, or maybe two. In a way it's a pity. All that sound and fury, that drama coming to a head, and no real meaning. White Wolf came closest to invoking substance as well as shadow, and yet the attempt, made with the modern, non-judgmental desire not to call anything evil (and, none the less, an utterly conventional definition of evil) , was tragically flawed.

Now the crest of the Millennium wave passes, the great swell moving like a hump in the night down the years into the past. And we wonder whether those things it picked up and polished off for us to see will fade into the night again, tossed up and forgotten on the beach like so much dross. Or, will their influence simply fade, a permanent part of us, but less noticeable, less urgent. Or are they simply here to stay, once known, never forgotten. For myself, I think those things based on the war in Heaven will fade pretty quickly - our culture is too embarrassed by even the most acceptable religious leanings. And there will be more settings built in the future, and fewer in the past. But for the rest, I can't say.

T. E. O. T. W. A. W. K. I.

I really like the phrase 'The End of the World as We Know it.' For one thing, it implies a world that changes, and continues, even as it ends (even if the world is unrecognizable, it still exist.) And, by the same token, it's something that can happen many times, in many ways, each time we recognize a significant change in the world around us. An apparently apocalyptic event masking a reality of continuing change and growth. However, at the moment what I really like about it is how well it sums up the (potential) state of the gaming industry, and therefore the gaming community.

Consider some of the rumors I've heard:

> 1) West End Games has lost the Star Wars license. Apparently, Lucas et al did not want to sell it to them.

> 2) At the same time, Rolemaster has lost the license to The Lord Of The Rings. And while they are busy putting together a live-action movie.

> 3) Along with the card game, Wizard's of the Coast developed a Pokemon RPG. But they couldn't market it, because the license was bought by someone else.

> 4) That someone else was Hasbro.

While we're on the topic of Hasbro, consider something else. One of the things that has really hurt the gaming industry has been the virtual collapse of distribution channels for the past several years - starting with the collapse in the comic book market in the early to mid ninties. Small, less well known, companies are particularly hard hit. But Hasbro might be large enough to bypass this problem, finding and using distribution channels that are still effective. Since the other game companies probably can't use these channels (either being the wrong kind of company, or too small, or both) Hasbro could have a virtual monopoly on gaming.

And what would they do with this 'monopoly'? Sell licensed products of course. To a whole generation of children that knows nothing about roleplaying, but a whole bunch about Star Wars, LOTR (from the movie), and Pokemon. Or, to put it another way, roleplaying may be about to hit the mainstream. Of course, I have no idea if Hasbro is even aware of the possibility. But I'll admit the rumors above make me think some offers have been made.

But, before everyone starts cheering, it might be wise to look at what has happened to other communities / activities that suddenly became popular. I'm thinking, in particular, of science fiction fandom. What, you say. Science Fiction isn't mainstream? Ah, but Star Trek and Star Wars are.

I once heard the story of the first Star Trek convention. A couple fans decided that science fiction conventions, while they had good points like meeting other Star Trek fans, weren't really what they were looking for. "Why don't we set up our own little convention," they thought, "something small, quiet, without all the distractions and craziness." So they did. And it was the biggest 'science fiction' convention in history, up to that point. Some of the networks even sent news cameras out to cover it.

No doubt a lot of people have offered explanations as to why. In my opinion it's simple. Star Trek was more popular than science fiction, a lot more popular. Or to put it another way, there were two kinds of Star Trek fans. Those who watched it because it was science fiction, and were also interested in Asimov and Heinlien, Moorcock and Zelazny. And those who watched it despite the fact that it was science fiction, who weren't really interested in Asimov and Heinlien, Moorcock and Zelazny even when they were introduced. And, when push came to shove, it turned out that the two groups didn't want to be in the same room together, or at least not in the same convention.

So, what did fandom do then? And years later, when they were inundated with teenage Luke Skywalker wanna bes? Redefined science fiction, so that the works in question were no longer a part of it. Which is really a pity.

And is this what I think will happen to the roleplaying community, when we are inundated with waves of new people who know nothing of our traditions and don't share our values? Whose interest in Pokemon does not imply at least a passing interest in GURPS, or Champions, or D&D, or Vampire, or Over the Edge?

Roughly speaking, yes. Hasbro, if they are smart and lucky, will create new distribution channels for licensed 'one shot' products, which will create a whole new class of roleplayer. Meanwhile, the other gaming companies will continue to use what is left of the current distribution channels, limping along as best they can until things fall apart or something better comes along.

But, before we mourn the end of roleplaying (and for me, with a vision of what roleplaying ought to be that does not at all match what I think Hasbro is doing to it, it is indeed something to mourn.) Before we mourn the end of roleplaying, consider where this article began. TEOTWAEKI, The End of the World as We Know It. An apparently apocalyptic phrase masking the reality of continuing change and growth. These are interesting times in the gaming industry. Interesting times indeed.

In Response: Where Do We Go From Here

I thought I would give you some of my thoughts on IR's status, especially in response to Joe's article in last issue. For the record, I don't think things are as bad as Joe seemed to imply. For one thing, we often see things in terms of what is sent in by non-household members, rather than what is sent out, which, of course, includes our zines. Because there are three of us this may be some 30 to 40 pages, almost half a normal sized issue. So things sometimes appear worse than they are.

On the other hand, we can't do it all alone. And we have lost several writers from Pete's day, at least two of which are now using the internet to distribute their work. And at least one IR subscriber, who never became a writer, distributes his work over the web. Nor is it a bad idea, in general, to look at what we are doing, and what we might improve. Let me try to address your points one at a time.

Layout: I think IR looks pretty good. Of course, there is always the problem of artwork, which is hard to come by. Even if we could afford to buy artwork (extremely unlikely, as it is much more expensive than writing) their would still be the problem of finding it. The alternative - commissions - is too slow in my experience. Of course I'm thrilled with anything the contributors of IR can produce. But the thrust of the APA has largely been written rather than graphic (we can only concentrate on so much at once, and I wouldn't have any idea how to run an APA for artists). Given our resources, I think we have done extremely well.

As far as the look of individual zines goes... The most important thing is that they are legible, and the biggest problem there is George's margins (before I took over, many people would rip IR apart in order to read his zine. I think things are better now, but it is still sometimes difficult). I appreciate some of the graphics and formatting that various zine writers use, but I don't think it should be a requirement. To me, it's the words that matter, not what form they are in.

Content: Now this is something that could be improved. I think main ingredient that's missing is inspiration. So, folks, how can I be more inspiring?

Seriously, I'd like to encourage scenario write-ups, character write-ups, how to articles, bits and pieces of settings (like an inn, or guardhouse), and other things that players and GMs can use. But aside from saying that I want this (come on guys, I want this) there's not much I can do. It's difficult to suggest these sorts of things as topics, especially when I'm expected to say something about the topic every issue (as you, yourself, keep telling me). Since I don't do a lot of GMing, and most of this is oriented towards GMs, I don't have a lot to contribute myself. For the same reason, and also because its not my style, it's difficult for me to lead by example.

At one time I'd thought I could use the creation of a shared world as the 'hub' around which this could be organized. We could create the broad outlines, and then individual contributors could fill in the details. Here a scenario, there an NPC, over here a logging camp, or temple, over there

a new spell or school of fencing. Of course, other GMs would have to adapt them, but isn't that what good GMs do anyway? But this requires a certain amount of enthusiasm for the setting created. Most of IRs contributors, even those who are interested, seem to think it is too much work.

While I'm on the topic, I suppose I should add that campaign write ups, reviews, and con reports are also useful. Knowing what people are doing, and what they think/feel about it, is an important piece of news. I've heard that some people find these boring, but I generally enjoy them (well, not if there are pages and pages of them - like over 100 - but I don't think IR has that problem.)

So, I will do what I can to be encouraging, which is to say that I enjoy reading these things, and I think they would make IR more interesting. Maybe I will find a way to work it into the suggested topics. And I will keep trying to convince you (Joe) to write up the Halloween run.

Price: These are the ways I think we can lower costs: (A) Print fewer copies of each issue, i.e. have fewer subscribers/contributors. (B) Get our own photocopier, which requires a lot of money initially and would mean more work for the editors each issue (C) Print a *lot* more copies, and be willing to wait months for printers to get around to our small, unimportant print run. (D) Find a less expensive form of postage (E) Go electronic. I'm working on D. The only other viable option is E, which I'll look at more closely later.

Marketing: First, let me say that it is not a question of my marketing skills. I consider marketing, and advertizing, something akin to the font of all evil. It's slimy, disgusting, manipulative, and unfair. Since it has to be done, and I really truly don't want to act that way, I'm extremely grateful that you're willing to do it. That being said, let me add two things. (1) Because of the APA's price structure, the fewer subscribers we have the more money is available for marketing efforts, such as giving out sample copies. In other words, we have the resources when we need them. I think we should find a way to take advantage of this. (2) Your efforts specifically targeting conventions seemed to work well. I think we should do this periodically, say once or twice a year, maybe once a quarter. (3) I think we - that mostly means Joe and I but can apply to others - need to go to more conventions and 'show the flag'. I'm particularly looking for a good Con in the DC area (close enough to Rich that I could visit or maybe even stay over.)

Scheduling: Maybe I'm too ambitious, but I'd prefer to stay with the current schedule. I'm afraid that decreasing the number of issues per year will actually make it harder on people, as it will be that much easier to procrastinate. Two months is long enough to take a break from writing, and then it is very hard to get started again. At least that is the way it works for me. The result would be fewer zines, not more.

Going Electronic: The advantage of electronic publishing is price. It's cheap, and, since all of the cost is 'overhead' ten pages is just as inexpensive as one, so you can write as much as you want. The disadvantage is that it requires technical finesse to create something that is accessible to everyone, or even a large subsection of everyone. Companies with large distribution channels can get away with making products that only work for most people because 'most people' is such a large group. IR is a small group, and creating technical specifications that even half of us can

work with may be difficult. Then there are the questions of pricing and organization. If contributors don't pay by volume, how do you determine their responsibility? What do subscribers pay for? As far as I know, there are no successful electronic APAs, so we have no model, and we would have to make things up as we went along.

In addition, there are questions of format and distribution. Some of the suggestions (in no particular order) are:

PDF: This is suggested as a file format. Its advantages are (A) The editors are reasonably familiar with it, and have the necessary hardware and software to use it. (B) It prints well, by which I mean the editors can assume that what prints out on the other end looks like what they produced. This is not true of, say, Word or Wordperfect files. (C) It is more universal than most of the formats that allow graphics. Its disadvantages are (A) It isn't really universal. (B) Although it can be read on screen, it isn't really made for this. So, to get the full benefit the subscriber has to print it out, effectively shouldering the printing costs for the issue. It may be cheaper from the editors viewpoint, but not overall.

HTML: Another file format. Like PDF, the editors are familiar with it. However, it requires a bit more effort to work with it. HTML is somewhat more universal than PDF. In other respects it is almost the exact opposite - it works well on screen but prints abysmally. So it has almost the exact opposite problem. It's genuinely cheap, but difficult to get a good hard copy if you want to save something.

ASCII: No, I'm not serious. There seems to be a preference in IR for allowing graphics, and ASCII doesn't. I'm only mentioning it because pure text ASCII is the only truly universal format I know of. (But, while I'm thinking about graphics... It occurs to me that the problems we have getting Artwork aren't going to go away just because we publish electronically. You (Joe) have just as much trouble finding artwork for the website, or for PDF files when you make them.)

Email Distribution: Obviously a form of distribution, sending IR to subscribers over Email. It's cheap (at least cheaper than postage) and easy to organize. By this I mean the editor controls who gets issues, and can therefore keep a list of subscribers and other information that lets us know how IR is doing. Without this core organization, it might be possible for the APA to fall apart.

Unfortunately, email is far from universal - some accounts don't allow attachments, or limit the size of email received. In fact, I'm leery of using email as the only distribution method, because I think it would limit the number of people who could/would subscribe to IR Even if we got more subscribers eventually, I think the initial result would be a loss of subscribers.

Web: Another method of distribution, either by posting the APA to the Web, or making it available as a download. Both methods, especially the first, have the advantage that they are, uh, popular. It is the method most people use for electronic distribution, so it is the method most potential subscribers are expecting - the one they are set up to deal with, and the one they are looking for. If we are going to electronic publishing to attract subscribers/contributors, this is the way to do it. Well, posting on the web is. I am not sure downloading would work as well.

The problem is, that while the Web is cheap compared to paper, *it is not utterly without cost.* There would have to be a way to cover that cost, to assure that those who were using the site would also maintain it. We do not have (and our ISP does not allow) the kind of website that would allow us to charge for access to the material on it. And in any case, that sort of thing is prohibitively expensive. The alternative - asking the contributors to bear all of the costs - does not sound right either. And, if the material was 'free', and stayed on the site (I'd like to keep back issues posted), there might be a problem with publication rights, for those contributors who wish to sell their articles elsewhere. The problem might be less severe if material could only be downloaded - perhaps a password system could be worked out to track it. I don't know.

CD or CD-R: There are a couple of advantages to this. (A) Since subscribers would actually get something physical, they would know what they were buying - as opposed to a pattern of electronic bits which is sometimes there, and sometimes isn't. At least with a CD they stay put in one place, and you can loan them out to a friend. It is, in a word, book-like. (B) We would have something to give away at Cons, etc. as a sample issue. (C) Like email, it would be easy to keep track of who gets what for what. Disadvantages are that it's not universal (maybe less universal than email) and might require some initial outlay of cash and a bit more work per issue. On the other hand, once it's set up, producing a CD is cheaper than printing, per issue.

Going Electronic, Overview: I've been thinking about IR and electronic publishing for a while, almost the whole year I've been editor. I would, in fact, like to take advantage of the possibility. Putting 'back issues' up on the web site is one way to do this - I'd like to get some more current issues up, and then keep putting them up as they come out. This might be a way to develop an electronic following, which would give us the base we need to go electronic. Another idea to consider is email distribution. It might not work for everyone - but some people, especially foreign subscribers, have truly outrageous postage rates, and it might work for them. On the other hand, I don't want to jump into electronic publishing too quickly, and lose the subscribers / contributors we do have. It is something that should be used to enhance IR, not just change it randomly.

Shutting Down: No.

Input Please: Yes absolutely. This may seem trite, but IR doesn't belong to me (us). It belongs to the contributors and subscribers. If you don't tell me (us) what you want, I (we) can't do it. Editors need feedback too.

Comments Interregnum #35

Rich Staats (The Guest #26): I enjoy hearing from your players, especially the story about gaming on the bus. When Cindy & I where playing the minimalist campaign, we often did that. Of course it was a bit easier, because we carried the game in our heads, so we didn't have a lot of

paraphernalia. Re: the US is better than the rest of the world. This may be true, but then again, in the decades preceding (and even during) the American Revolution, England billed itself as a land of freedom. Not without good reason either - they were one of the few representational governments in Europe. As for me, my experiences have been sufficiently painful and unfair that even if America is the 'best' that can be found, I still have to complain, and try to find ways to improve it. Re: Rules in troupe play on who GMs. I guess I was asking about a hypothetical situation. What would you do with a good, long time, roleplayer, such as myself, who truly doesn't want to GM, and will vote with her feet if the rule "everybody GMs" is applied? Actually, this is a practical question. I think troupe play 'vacations' are cool, and would work for us, but I pretty much have the position above as far as GMing goes.

George Phillies (Refugee): Hmm... I was expecting commentary, in answer to some of my questions. Perhaps I was unclear. What kind/level of critique/commentary do you want for The Shining Sea? Do you plan to continue revising the work? How much detail do you want? Re: the current installment. I enjoyed as always, but I'm not sure what the purpose is for most of it, except, perhaps, Cloud's conversation with Star. The shuttle rescue, in particular, seemed a little slow. But I liked Eclipse's walk out to the lake, even if it didn't "accomplish" anything.

Cindy Shettle (Words on the Wing #6): I don't think the way you build PCs is all that bad. You're not the only one who doesn't start with the personality - I don't either. (I usually start either with the PC's beliefs or their goals, the resources, including powers, they can use to reach those goals, and the difficulties preventing them from reaching their goals. If I start with beliefs, goals often flow from that. If I start with goals, I work out their beliefs and attitude towards their goals & life in general, which gives me the beginning of personality.)

Re: Immortality. I agree that it wouldn't change my lifestyle in the short term, but, like Collie, I seriously doubt that I'd run out of things to do or enthusiasm for the things that interest me. My problem is the amount of time I would spend working on things I don't like in order to make a living. Very few immortal characters are portrayed as poor, but retirement plans and financial planning are set up with the presumption that you will eventually die. And I have a hard enough time worrying about how to make ends meet for the next couple of years, let alone eternity.

Re: Me and My Shadow. Its interesting seeing the final product of a story I played 'sounding board' for in the earlier stages. It came out better than I expected. I liked the way you turned it around at the end, so that it was about what Jessica choose to do with the wallet and the consequences. I also liked the use of irony throughout the story. The story could be expanded, with more character development and flashbacks (perhaps for both characters). Also, it would work better with a one or two sentence explanation that Adam is Methos at the beginning (I know everyone knows that, but it's not inappropriate to the opening scene or overall theme.)

Michael Lavoie (True Magick #17): I know what you mean about the procrastination, and being busy. It's a wonder I get anything (like this) done at all. Whatever you happen to send along is appreciated. And yes, I'd like to hear about your campaign. The story about Garth's mistake was quite entertaining. Re: London. It's one of my dreams in life to be able to travel around Europe for, say, about a year or so, maybe two. Your trip sounds excellent - a real

experience and not just the chance to see a disnified facade. If I do travel I'll have to get some pointers from you. Re: my recruitment article. I wish I could put it in plainer language. Or maybe give it more technical backing. Or both. And then distribute it for exactly that purpose. Though, perhaps, if Hasbro has any say, it's a moot point.

Elizabeth McCoy (The Real McCoy): Hmm... People really seem to take this computer problem stuff seriously. But its not an IR curse, really. Its just that we have rather a lot of computers (5 going on 6, but only 3 'main' terminals) and with computers having a half life measured in months we usually have problems with one or two of them in any one year, or about every 8 IRs. The latest iteration was pretty severe, hitting about three machines (one died) but for the moment everything is working reasonably well (knock on wood.)

I'm sorry you won't make it to Arisia, especially since I think I've finally made it onto some of the panels. By the time I get there I will probably be a mass of nerves, and could use some moral support. Oh well. Thank you for the info on the pictures, by the way. I am not sure if Jordan's 'human' face is very masculine, but it looks wonderfully angelic. While I'm on the topic, I also like the 'risque' picture on your website - the one with two characters embracing. I'd ask Joe to use it in one of your zines, but I'm not sure that you would, ah, approve.

Joseph Teller (The Swashbuckling Mage #6): Hmm... Except for my comments on IR above, I don't have much to say. Re: your comments to Collie about the recruitment topic (Should one recruit if gaming makes people into nerds) - I'm sorry if I sounded too harsh in the way I presented the topic. I was trying to find a reasonable response to people, within the gaming community, who held this view. And, while I think the topic is more complex than either/or, I also think the facts - that gaming is, currently, a marginalized activity - shouldn't be ignored.

Special Appearance by:

Michael O'Hare – Actor –
Babylon 5 Commander Sinclair

Richard Hatch – Actor –
Battlestar Glactica Capt. Apollo

Jack Stauffer – Actor –
Battlestar Galactic Bojay

Sandra C. Morresse – Writer –
Sword & Sorceress

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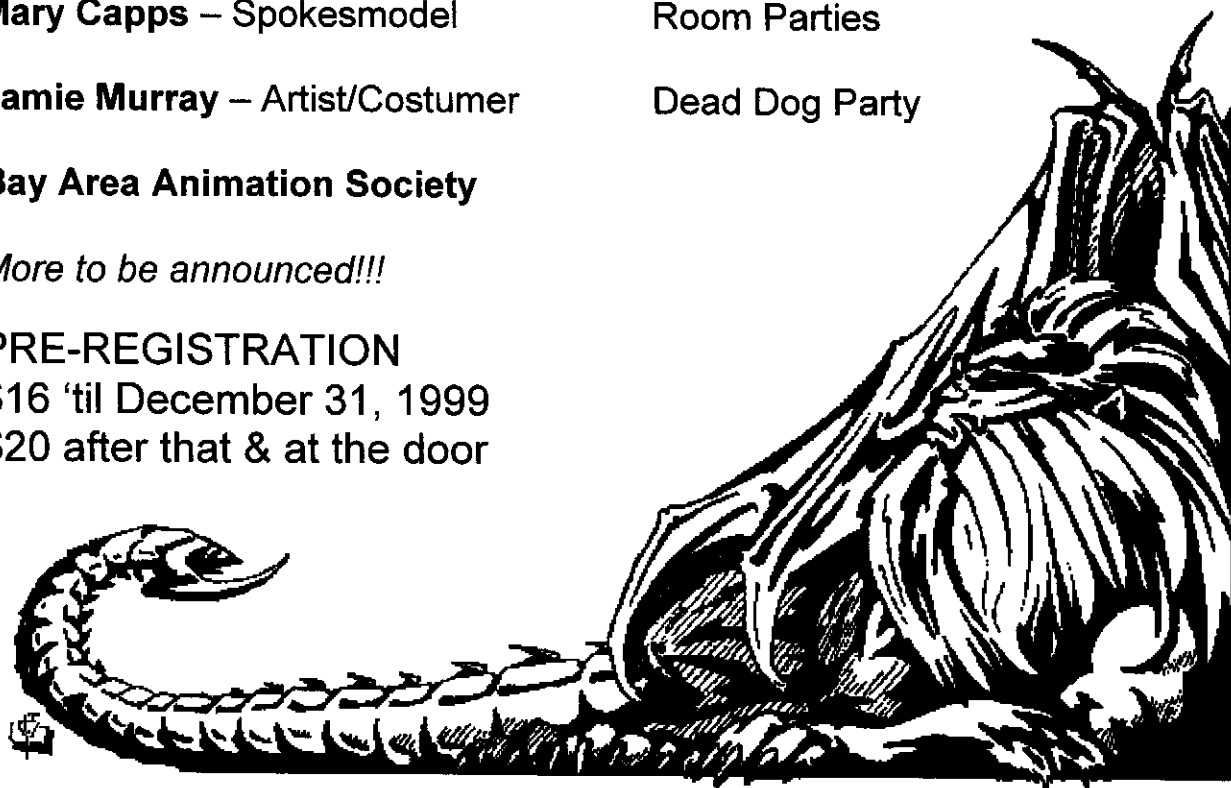Masquerade Ball & Contest

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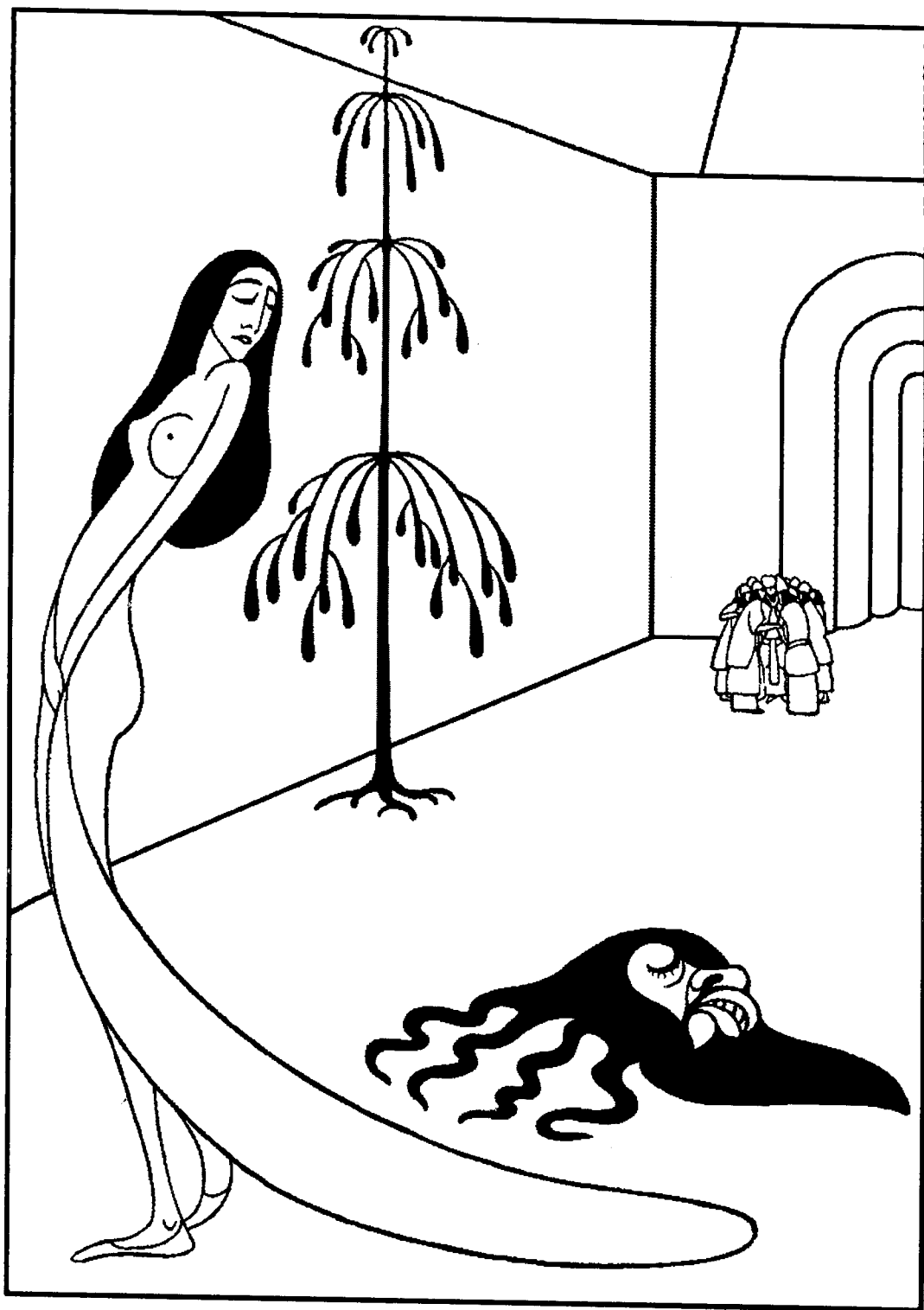
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